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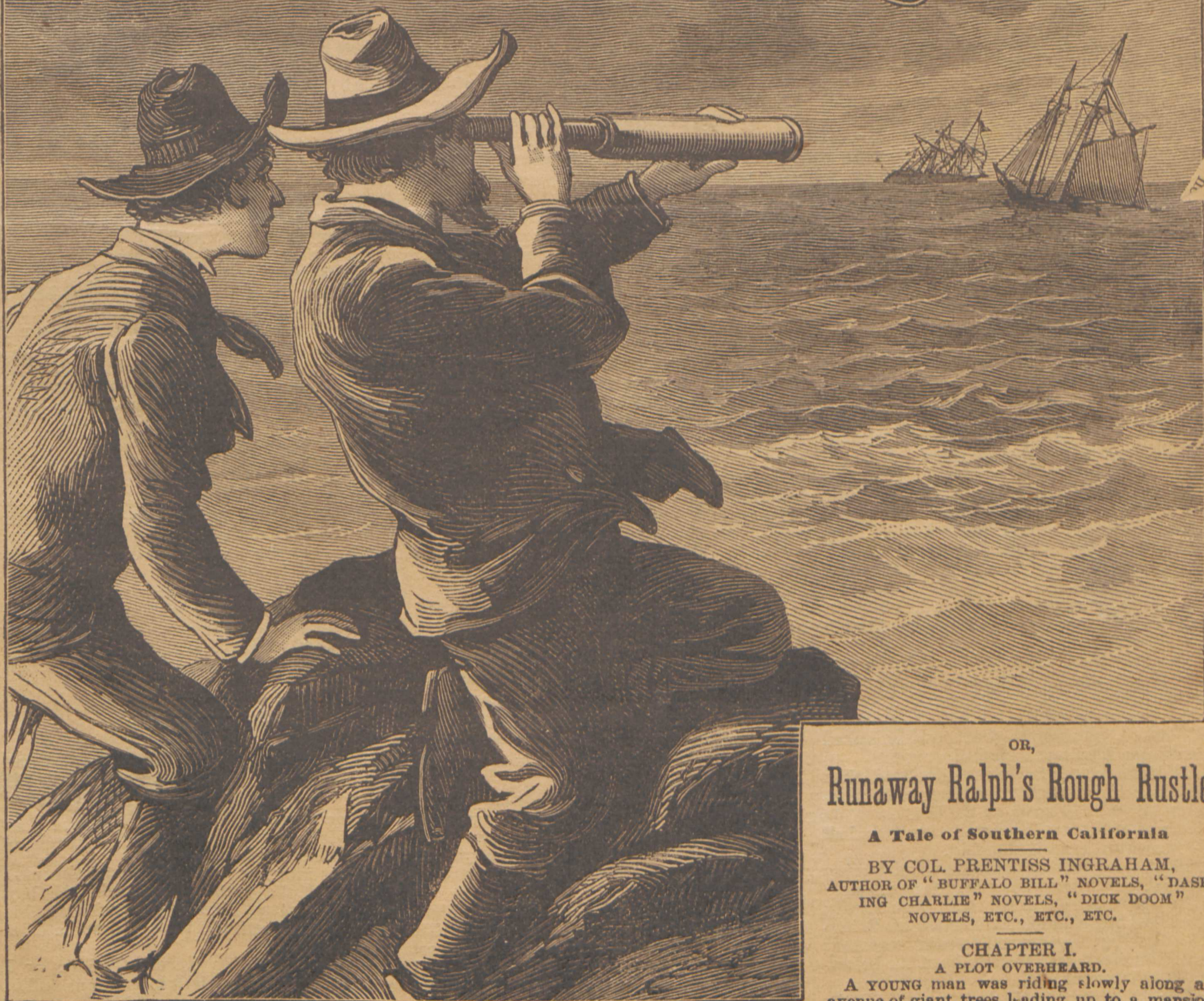
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MARLO, THE COWBOY COASTER



"MY GOD! IT IS PEARL! SHE HAS GONE TO THE RESCUE!" AND CAPTAIN KARL SHOOK
WITH A SUDDEN FEAR.

OR, Runaway Ralph's Rough Rustle.

A Tale of Southern California

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
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ING CHARLIE" NOVELS, "DICK DOOM"
NOVELS, ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A PLOT OVERHEARD.

A YOUNG man was riding slowly along an
avenue of giant trees leading up to a mansion
half a mile away, and upon which rested the
finger of decay and desolation.

The broad avenue was overgrown with weeds, the branches of the trees were untrimmed, and the massive gateway was imposing only as a ruin.

As he neared the mansion it was seen to be a large, rambling old house containing fully half a hundred rooms, and with piazzas, wings and massive windows which gave it a very imposing appearance.

The grounds had once been most beautiful, but were now a wilderness, and the large and numerous outbuildings all bore the same look of decay upon them.

There were hundreds of acres of fields, meadows and woodland around the mansion, and yet there was no sign of human being near, other than the young fellow, mounted upon a spirited pony, who was making his way to the place so long deserted.

The youth was well dressed, had an air of refinement, and looked like one well born and bred.

He carried a small shotgun across his saddle and his face was full of fearless determination, as though bent on some mission of danger.

As he neared the mansion he rode out among a dense growth of ornamental trees, encircling an arbor, and dismounting hitched his horse.

Then he advanced on foot toward the mansion, his gun slung upon his shoulder.

As he neared the deserted structure he paused and mused aloud:

"And Old Ben said I would not dare come to the Haunted Hall and remain until after nightfall, for fear of the ghosts that haunt the place.

"Now, I never saw a ghost and I am not afraid of one, or at least I don't think I am; but, I may get some terrible scare.

"Still, I would not take a 'dare from Old Ben; so here I am.

"He told me the door was unlocked, and I was to go in at the left wing and make a chalk-mark upon each room in the house, so I could come to-morrow and see if I had been here.

"Just at midnight I was to light this candle, and if I did so it would burn out before day, and he says it will burn just six hours and he will be here at dawn to see if it is still burning; but I must remain in the dark until I light it at midnight, and the village clock I can hear strike the hours.

"Well, here goes to face the spooks! I can get all over the house and make my chalk-marks before sunset."

So saying the brave fellow cast a look toward the sun which was nearing the western horizon, and walked boldly toward the mansion.

He ascended the broad steps, walked along the piazza to the door which he had been told to open, and though the lock creaked, as though long unused, the door opened easily.

He stepped into a vast hall and closed the door behind him.

A damp, musty odor pervaded the place, and the hall was dismal and gloomy, though it was furnished.

The furniture was quaint, and of a century before, and upon the walls hung portraits of titled ladies and knights in armor.

"It seems to me that I have been in this hall before," mused the youth, and he looked about him in an awed kind of way.

Thus he stood for some time and then making a chalk-mark upon the floor he passed on into a large room on the left.

It was a library, filled with books and all of them were worn and moldy.

Thus from room to room he went, leaving his chalk mark conspicuously everywhere.

He passed into what had been richly furnished bed-chambers, the spacious dining-hall, a gallery of arts, a neglected conservatory and even down into the depths of the below-stairs apartments.

Finally he came to the last room of all, the large parlors, hung with faded, moth-eaten

curtains, and full of what had at one time been most gorgeous furniture.

As he glanced over the rooms his ears suddenly caught the sound of voices without.

He sprung to a window and saw two men ascending the steps.

At once he ran for a hiding-place, while he said:

"It is Sir Gurney Gladden and his gamekeeper, Barney.

"Oh! how they both hate me! Why have they come here?"

The youth had sprung behind a curtain over a bay window, and there stood, holding his gun in his hands.

He heard the door open, the heavy steps in the hall, and then the two men entered the parlor and Sir Gurney Gladden said:

"He has not yet come, Barney, so we will be ready for him."

"Yis, Sir Gurney, and to-morrow you will be the heir to the title of Harcourt Hall, sur."

"Yes, for the young pretender will be dead. He must never leave this old rookery alive, Barney," was the low, determined response of Sir Gurney Gladden.

CHAPTER II.

THE PLOT.

THE words of Sir Gurney Gladden and Barney could refer only to the youth in hiding, and he knew it.

Sir Gurney was a young man of twenty-five, with a dissipated look and a face by no means attractive.

He had the look of a man of violent passions, and was known as a sport and wild, reckless spendthrift whose rank and future prospects caused him to be tolerated.

He dwelt upon a lonely part of the English coast, lived beyond his means, keeping up a style he had not the income to support.

Barney, his gamekeeper, was an Irishman who was feared by all the country folks round about.

The youth, Ralph Rollo, as he was known, was a waif, picked up by a retired army officer, Captain Scott Cameron, while cruising in his yacht near his home.

The waif was an infant then, and adrift in an open boat with no clue to his identity!

Captain Scott Cameron, an old bachelor with means, at once adopted the child, and did all in his power for him; but being an austere man he never made the little fellow his companion, and told him he was not his son, as soon as he was old enough to understand it, and plainly let him know that he need expect no more from him than a good education and start in life.

Thus, while Ralph respected his benefactor he never really loved him and grew up apart from him.

But in Old Ben Bowline, a fisherman on the coast, living near the captain's house, Ralph had a companion if not a friend.

He was taught by the fisherman to sail a boat, was taken on cruises with him, and under his tuition became a fine sailor for his years.

At home Ralph had a tutor to teach him his lessons, and the captain taught him to ride, drive, shoot and fence, so that the boy's education was by no means neglected.

Harcourt Hall was an old house whose heir was missing.

A title and a large fortune went with it; but a tragedy had occurred there years before, when Lord Redmond had been killed one night, along with his secretary and valet, and the murderers had never been traced.

The young wife of Lord Redmond had been so broken in health by the shock that she started upon a sea voyage, and the vessel she sailed on was never again heard of, and was supposed to have gone down at sea in a storm.

Harcourt Hall was deserted by all, and

thus became a ruin, almost, while it was regarded as haunted, and shunned by all who knew its tragic story. Even stout-hearted men dared not go there by day.

But plucky Ralph having said to Old Ben that he was not afraid of ghosts, had been challenged to do just what the reader has seen he had attempted—to spend a night in the house.

A year or so before Ralph had gotten into trouble with Barney the gamekeeper, for shooting near Sir Gurney's woodland, and only by threatening to kill the man if he struck him did Ralph escape a severe thrashing.

Barney of course told Sir Gurney, and that hot-tempered young sport threatened to horsewhip the youth at sight, but was kept at bay by plucky Ralph's little shot-gun.

It was therefore not to be wondered at that Ralph, upon seeing the two come into the old mansion, and hearing their words, sought to hide from them, and did so.

To his regret they entered the parlor, and their first words uttered proved to him that he had cause to fear them, and another, too, whom he had believed to be his friend, for he saw that there was a plot against him, which, young as he was, almost overwhelmed him.

The two men entered the room and Sir Gurney threw himself upon a sofa while the gamekeeper took a chair near the window.

The sun was upon the horizon, the shadows were deepening in the room and that the two men were watching and waiting there was no doubt.

Behind the heavy curtains of the window the boy remained in hiding and as motionless as a statue.

"You think he will surely come, Barney?" asked Sir Gurney.

"Yis, sur."

"I fear he will be afraid to do so."

"Not that lad, sur, for he's not afraid of anything. He don't even fear me."

"That is strange, for every one else in the country does fear you, and no wonder, after your having shot several men you caught upon my estate thieving."

"Yis, sur, and I'd do it again."

"You are very faithful to me, Barney; but I fear we are here uselessly, as Ralph will not come. I would not blame him if he did not, for this gloomy old place gives me the shivers."

"I don't like it myself, sur, but then it was the best place to get rid of the young chap, and so I told Old Ben to send him here."

"You see, sur, we can lead his horse back into the road and no one will ever look for him here; and if he is ever found here it will be thought that he was frightened to death."

"Well, Barney, remember, if he comes you are to strike the blow."

"Yis, sur, on the terms we agreed on between us, while old Ben is to have his promised gold for sending the lad here."

"Of course I will keep every pledge, Barney; but I will take my stand in yonder window and watch," and Sir Gurney advanced toward the very window where Ralph had taken refuge!

CHAPTER III.

A FATAL SHOT.

BARNEY still stood at the window overlooking the piazza, and the one where Sir Gurney sought to take up a point of observation commanded a view of the avenue approaching the mansion, and along which he expected their victim to come.

It was growing twilight, but as the man drew back the curtain he beheld the boy standing at bay, his shot-gun raised to his shoulder, his attitude that of desperate determination.

"Stand aside, Sir Gurney Gladden, or I will kill you!" cried Ralph, in a tone full of resolute purpose to carry out his threat.

"Ho, Barney, he is here," cried Sir Gur-

ney, at the same time springing backward to seek shelter.

Barney came on the jump, and his words told Ralph just what to expect.

"I'll knife him, sur."

But, there rung out in the old mansion a shot, Sir Gurney dropped in his tracks, then the left-hand barrel of the little shot-gun spoke and the big brute Barney, with a wild yell, rolled over on the floor.

Bounding over the two fallen men Ralph rushed to the door, out into the twilight and mounting his horse rode swiftly away.

He halted as he reached the highway, but only for an instant.

Then he cried in a voice full of anguish:

"They will hang me! they will hang me! I dare not go home, so must fly. But, where shall I go—where can I go?"

"Ah! old Ben's fishing-smack is always provisioned for a couple of weeks' cruise. I can handle her well, so I will take her, for Ben is my mortal foe, not my friend.

"Yes, I must do that! I will go by home, get the money I have saved up, leave my horse and run down to Reef Rock, and old Ben's fishing-smack shall bear me away from here."

So deciding the boy, his heart torn with conflicting emotions, rode rapidly to his home.

He knew that his adopted father was away, and hastily entering the house he went to his own room, got some clothing and half a hundred guineas he had laid away, and was soon making his way down to the shore.

At that hour he knew that Old Ben, his treacherous friend, was in his cabin enjoying his pipe, and slipping by cautiously he sprung into a skiff and rowed out to the sloop.

The tide was running out, and raising the anchor he let the craft drift seaward.

When out of the hearing of any one on the shore he raised sail, reefing down, for a storm was threatening, and stood out to sea with the boldness of one who held no fear and was conscious of his own skill.

Thus he stood on until the storm broke and all through the night he had all that he could do to weather it.

The smack was a splendid sea boat, and in many a storm before had the boy been out in her, but he had had the old fisherman to aid him then.

But he did not despair and scudded along before the storm until the day dawned.

There was no land in sight, and with the day the clouds blew away, the sun rose brightly and the winds subsided to a gentle breeze.

Then Ralph left his tiller and went down in the cabin in search of food.

As he had said, the smack was well provisioned and he soon had breakfast ready, after which, having cast a long look around the sea for a sail, he lay down to rest.

He dropped to sleep at once and not until late in the afternoon did he awaken.

Then his face paled as he looked about him and realized his desperate situation.

He quickly rallied, however, ate dinner and then shook the reefs out of his sails, after which he consulted a marine map of the coast tacked upon the cabin door, and looked at the compass to get his bearings as well as he could.

"As near as I can make it out I have been driven straight out to sea and am a hundred miles from the English coast.

"I only hope I will be seen by some vessel and picked up.

"But what can I tell them when they wish to know who I am and how I came to be here?

I must not say that I killed Sir Gurney Gladden and his gamekeeper, and am a fugitive from justice, for then they will take me back to England and hang me.

"No, I will say that I was driven out to

sea while the skipper was ashore, and that won't be far wrong.

"Well, night is coming on, and I suppose, if there are such things as ghosts, the spirits of Sir Gurney and Barney will haunt me when the darkness falls."

The fugitive Ralph watched the sun sink into the watery horizon with a foreboding of evil, and then took his place at the tiller, still heading seaward.

He was about to set his lights when he sighted a vessel, and his experienced eye soon told him that it was a ship-of-war.

He did not wish to be taken by a vessel-of-war, and so he did not set his lights, and saw the vessel go by him in silence, his little craft escaping every eye on board.

So he held on for another night and another day.

His face was becoming haggard now from anxiety, his eyes were sunken, and his brave heart began to be filled with dread.

Dark storm clouds were skurrying across the skies, the wind was rising, and fearing a terrible night he reefed down mainsail, took in his jib, made all fast, and waited.

The storm struck him full after nightfall, and after hours of hard work, he weathered it, when, utterly worn out, he sunk to sleep at his post.

A hail aroused him; the day had come, and a large ship was near at hand!

Was he saved?

CHAPTER IV.

A MYSTERIOUS PEOPLE.

UPON a rugged point on the coast of California, a hamlet of fishermen had been built, and their cabins were scattered here and there, most of them sheltered by groups of trees, and with a small garden plot near by.

The point ran backward to a mountain range, where there was game in plenty, and pasture lands for the few cattle owned by the coastmen, and in a sheltered haven were anchored their little boats.

There were those who asserted that these humble dwellers upon the coast were not simply fishermen, but wreckers as well, and that they were guilty of certain stage-coach robberies that now and then occurred upon the trail which the coaches followed up and down the coast, from settlements to mining-camps.

Be that as it may, the hamlet held as brave and hardy a set of human beings, men, women and children included, as one could find upon the free land of America.

They were good riders, splendid sailors, and managed with fishing and other pursuits to make a good living, for all were well to do.

One of the coziest of these coast cabins was situated in a niche of the range, as it were, commanding a view of the whole point with the other houses, and having about it a well-cultivated garden, some outbuildings and a general air of comfort and contentment.

The cabin consisted of four rooms, was built of logs, had a broad piazza across the front, and flowers grew close at hand, evidently carefully tended by some one who loved to care for them.

The cabin was white-washed, and within there was an air of neatness resting upon everything.

There in that home dwelt one who was known as Captain Karl Kenton. He was the acknowledged ruler of the settlement, his word being law, he being the judge of all disputes that might arise between the people.

He was a man of fine presence, tall, gray-bearded, and possessing a noble face.

He wore his iron-gray hair long, dressed in half-sailor, half-cowboy costume and never went without his belt of arms, and they were the best that could be purchased in San Francisco.

He had come to the settlement some years

before, had asked to dwell among the people, did all he could to better their condition and was not long in rising to the head of the community.

He had built his house, had sent a crew to San Francisco for a fishing vessel, and it was the largest and best of the two-score little vessels.

He possessed money, that was certain, and his earnings he turned into the treasury of the settlement for the good of all.

After a year's stay in the settlement Captain Karl Kenton had sailed up to San Francisco with his crew of four men, and when he returned he was accompanied by a young woman and little girl who he said were his wife and daughter.

A refined woman with beautiful face, the wife yet seemed content in that strange home, happy in her husband's love, though his gray hair and beard would indicate that he was her senior by many years.

Still, there were those who said that he was prematurely gray, that his step and bearing were youthful and that he was a man with a history; but, be he what he might he was loved and respected by all, while his wife won the hearts of every one.

Inland a few leagues Captain Karl, as he was oftener called, had a ranch, where he possessed a number of cattle, and as herders he had men from the fishing hamlet.

Pearl, the little daughter of Captain Karl, was a beautiful fairy of six years when she first came to Point Desolation, as the settlement was called; but she was not long in becoming as hardy as a mountain pine, and within a few years could sail a boat as well as any man, as far as skill went, while she would spend hours in the saddle when ashore, riding her spirited mustang.

Her mother and father were both well-educated, that the sea settlement knew, and so she was taught to study, and having a natural talent for music soon learned to play upon the guitar and cornet, the notes of the latter ringing out at night over the waters, or giving warning of her coming when she was away upon a ride to her father's ranch.

She carried a small rifle, and revolver, and her true aim furnished the table generously with game.

The men at the ranch called her "Mountain Pearl," while the coasters gave her the name of the "Pearl of the Sea."

Such were the mysterious Captain Karl and his family, dwelling there among those rude coasters, when well indeed could they have won admiration in the society of the metropolis.

What strange reason had caused them to seek a home there no one but the captain and his wife could tell, and they most faithfully kept their secret locked within their own hearts.

Years passed by after their coming to Point Desolation and still they lingered there, seemingly contented with their lot.

Mrs. Kenton and Pearl often went to sea with the captain, for the cabin of his little vessel was well fitted up for them, and they enjoyed a cruise as much as they did a stay on the ranch and a ride and camp in the mountains and valleys, while twice a year they had a run up to San Francisco, for a week, when the Pearl of the Sea saw something of the great world which her parents seemed to know all about and to religiously seclude themselves from.

CHAPTER V.

THE WRECK.

It was a dark night of storm upon the Pacific Ocean, the waves running wild and savagely, and tossing about on their curling tops a large vessel which had been swept clean of her masts.

From her decks the lights on Desolation Point had doubtless been seen, for suddenly out over the black waters flashed a red flame and the deep boom of a gun followed.

Within their snug cabins the people of Point Desolation were talking cheerily, and listening to the howling of the winds and the roar of the breakers as they were dashed against the rocks.

The men had gone down to have a look at their boats, in the sheltered haven, and finding them riding easily had returned to their cabins.

In the home of Captain Karl were seated the three inmates: the father, mother and daughter.

The room was a cheery one, brightly lighted, and Pearl sat near the table reading aloud to her parents.

The captain's stern but noble face wore a look of sadness as he sat there, hearing yet hardly heeding the words falling from his daughter's lips.

Mrs. Karl, as the people preferred to call her, was engaged in sewing as well as listening.

She certainly did not appear to be the mother of a young girl verging upon her teens, for her form was yet slender and graceful, and her grace of movement that of a queen.

Pearl was the picture of perfect health and happiness, and looked very lovely in a jaunty sailor suit which, with her mother's aid, she had just made for herself.

There were shelves filled with books, several paintings, a number of sketches, marine and landscape, a couple of guitars, a bugle, flute and violin, and other things to entertain and amuse.

A large black cat lay at the feet of Mrs. Karl, while a huge Newfoundland dog was asleep at the feet of Pearl.

The picture was certainly a homelike and happy one, and the three appeared unconscious of the storm raging without until, apparently awaking from a reverie, Captain Karl said, breaking in upon Pearl's reading:

"What a terrible night it is at sea."

Pearl laid aside her book, for she had been listening as she read to the howling winds and roaring waters.

"Yes, Karl, and I hope no unfortunate vessel is near the coast to-night," Mrs. Karl said.

"I sincerely hope so, wife; but listen to the pines how they moan as the wind sweeps through them— Ah! some one comes!"

There was a quick step without, a light knock and a man entered enveloped in a storm-coat and hat.

As he threw aside his hat and wraps he revealed a tall form, well built and a darkly-bronzed, fearless face.

He was a young man of twenty-four, and was known as a daring sailor and bold huntsman as well.

"Ho, Marlo, any news that brings you out on such a night as this?" Captain Karl demanded.

"Yes, captain; I just ran into the harbor in my sloop and—"

"What! you were out?"

"Yes, sir, I ran down from Frisco and the storm caught me."

"Why did you not put into some haven of refuge?"

"I preferred to hold on, captain, and, as you see, got into port in safety," and he smiled at his feat.

"You were fortunate! but you are a bold and skillful sailor, Marlo, and your craft is a good one, while your crew know their skipper well."

The young man flushed at the compliment, and said quickly:

"I saw the storm coming, and far out at sea it struck a large vessel, and dismayed her."

"Ah! where was this?"

"Some half a dozen leagues off the point, sir; but I saw them rig jury masts and try to beat off, and they seemed to hold their own until dark, when the storm increased in

such fury she must be driven ashore, and she would strike the reef off this point I feel certain."

"Then we must be on the lookout for her, and lend what aid we can to her crew."

"We can lend no aid, Captain Karl, for the storm is increasing in fury each moment; but we men can be on the shore to see the wreck and the crew tossed out by the breakers."

"And perhaps save many; but you say she is a large vessel?"

"Yes, sir."

"About what tonnage would you think, Marlo?"

"Well, sir, about seven to eight hundred I should say, and she is barque-rigged."

"Then she draws too much to come over the reef half a league off-shore, and will strike there, though such a craft should hold together for at least an hour or two even in this sea, and perhaps we can get out to her."

"Yes, Marlo, her crew must be saved if it is in the power of our people to do so," spoke Pearl, decidedly.

The young sailor turned toward her, admiration in his glance, for youthful as she was Pearl was now, in truth, a child-woman, appearing several years older than she really was.

"Do you tell me to go out to the wreck if she sinks, Pearl?" he asked in a significant tone.

"I tell you to do your duty like a man, Marlo, if the wrecked crew need your aid," was the reply.

Before more could be said there came the deep boom of a heavy gun.

"Hark! They appeal for succor and we must not be deaf to their cry."

"The ship is coming ashore, Marlo, so quick! let us down to the rocks and lend a hand to save her crew," cried Captain Karl. Hastily he donned his storm-coat and hat, which his wife brought for him, while Pearl said decidedly:

"And I go too!"

CHAPTER VI.

A GIRL TO THE RESCUE.

THE deep peal of the gun, crying out for help in the darkness and storm, caused every cabin to become alive at once with excitement and alarm.

Doors flew open and men, women and boys, enveloped in storm coats, sallied forth to go down to the rocky shore and see the work of wreck and death that must follow, for what power could save a vessel driving upon that rock-bound coast then?

The first to reach the scene where the breakers were launched upon the rocks, sending tons of spray high up on the rugged point, were Captain Karl, Marlo and Pearl.

The night glasses revealed a large hulk far out driving shoreward amid the mountain-like waves, and ever and anon her position and danger were plainly marked by the flash of the gun entreating aid from those ashore.

The entire settlement was soon assembled upon the rocky cliff, all gazing seaward, and watching the flashing of the appeal guns, and the wall of white foam some distance out that marked the reef upon which she must soon strike.

"What can be done, captain?" asked Marlo, as they reached the scene.

"Nothing," was the low reply.

Then the captain added:

"We can only try and secure those who may be driven ashore, but few, if any, will live in such a sea."

"It would be madness to go out in this storm, which is the wildest I have ever seen on the coast," Marlo said.

"Yes, it would be madness to make the attempt," repeated the captain.

"Then you will not go, Marlo?"

The question was asked by Pearl.

"No, Pearl; I will take big chances, as all who know me will admit, but never could a boat in our fleet live in such a sea, or a man dare risk it," was the answer.

"And I say the same," said an old sailor who heard the words of the young man.

As others arrived they gave their opinion in the same way, and so all that could be done was to stand and watch the vessel coming on to her doom.

Nearer and nearer she came, the gun firing more rapidly now and its danger notes becoming most piteous in a seemingly useless appeal for help.

The winds and waves increased in violence each moment, the sea drove landward with a force that shook the solid rocks, and recoiling formed a caldron in which it seemed no vessel could live.

The reef, rising at high tide half a dozen feet above the sea, broke the force of the mighty waves and formed a barrier which in a manner protected the inlet in which the little fishing fleet was anchored, while a rocky arm putting off from the point formed a natural harborage which was safe even for the smallest boats to an anchor in.

The entire settlement, men, women and children, were now gathered upon the point, gazing seaward.

In the cabin windows lamps had been set, as though to guide the ship landward, yet it seemed only to add to the misery of those on the doomed wreck.

But the people ashore meant that the lights should show sympathy if they could lend no aid, and that they would be ready to nurse any who should reach the shore.

"See, they are almost upon the reef."

"Every man on board is doomed," said Captain Karl Kenton sadly.

"Yes, cap'n, there's no help fer um," an old man added.

"The ship won't stand half an hour after striking," a third said.

"She'll go to pieces at once with the shock, I'm thinking," the old man announced.

"If she don't the sea will soon pound her into kindling wood."

"Poor souls!" a woman murmured, in deep agitation.

"Is there no hope for them, Karl?" asked Mrs. Kenton, as she slipped her hand into the arm of her husband.

"I see none whatever."

"I feared that Pearl might force Marlo to go, Karl?"

"He saw that it would be utter madness, and told her so."

"Where is Pearl?"

"I have not seen her since we came to the Point together."

"She is in the crowd somewhere, and—"

"Look there!"

The cry came from Marlo, and his eyes were turned down upon the waters of the inlet.

Every gaze followed his own, and then all beheld a small craft running out of the inlet.

It was the schooner belonging to Captain Karl, the stanchest vessel in the fleet, and she was flying along under mainsail, foresail and jib.

She had run out of the protected anchorage, had stood across the inlet upon the port tack, and coming back upon the short leg was again standing off on a course that would clear the point, where she would feel the full fury of the incoming sea and winds.

And as they all gazed at the little vessel, Captain Karl having turned his glass upon her, cried in a tone of anguish:

"My God! it is Pearl! she has gone to the rescue!" and Captain Karl shook with a sudden fear.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RUN OUT.

WHEN it was known who it was that had gone to the rescue of the crew of the ship, the excitement was intense among the people.

Marlo uttered a savage oath and at once strode away toward the little harbor where his boat was at anchor, calling to his own crew to follow him.

Captain Karl stood like one dazed, while his wife gave utterance to the prayer:

"Heaven have mercy upon her!"

"She has your boat, cap'n," said an old sailor.

"Yes."

"If any craft will live she will, cap'n."

"That is my only hope; but, who is with her?"

"Does yer glass show?"

"It is too dark to see. I recognized her at the tiller with a man, as the light from the companionway shone upon her," Captain Karl explained.

"I saw her speak to young Jessup, then to Kronheim, Caleb Snow and several others, and they all went toward the harbor," a woman observed.

"Then she picked out the best men in the settlement for her crew," Captain Karl averred, and, after a moment, added:

"But one craft is enough to risk in this storm; Marlo must not go, so go and tell him I forbid his doing so."

The man he addressed started off on his errand, while all now watched the little schooner and the wreck.

"That seals her doom," cried Captain Karl as the last flash of a gun came, revealing the wreck in the very midst of the breakers.

Another instant and the hull arose upon a mighty wave, and the crash as she was hurled upon the reef, reached the ears of those upon the Point.

There were wild cries following, and then ominous silence.

"She cannot hold together long there," a sailor declared.

"She has been cast beam on upon the reef, and will be beaten to pieces within the hour," said another.

Then all that could be done was to watch the Scud, as the little schooner was called.

She had set her lights, to give hope of her coming to the people on the wreck, and was fairly flying into the teeth of the gale, making short tacks, and apparently half the time under water.

The firing on board the wreck had ceased, but suddenly there flashed up a blue light, revealing her appalling position with the brightness of day.

The seas were breaking over her furiously, but she had struck the highest part of the reef, and being beam on, formed a lee that was to the advantage of the little craft going to the rescue of those on board.

When she struck, a number on her decks had been washed off into the sea, and Captain Karl had sent men down to the shore to see if any unfortunates could be saved.

The Scud, meanwhile, had beaten well up to the wreck, and the blue lights, kept constantly burning on board, revealed a score of forms upon the vessel, crouching for safety under the bulwarks to windward, and that they were gazing with commingled hope and despair upon the little schooner.

Suddenly the messenger sent by Captain Karl returned to say that he had arrived too late, as Marlo had already started when he reached the shore of the cove.

He had pointed out the second little vessel then working out to sea, and Captain Karl said:

"When Marlo gets the full force of the sea and wind he will have to run back."

Soon after the truth of the captain's words were realized, as the second little vessel was seen to stagger terribly, then almost disap-

pear from sight, and a moment after she wore around, her mainsail was lowered and under jib alone she ran back to her harbor.

But, Marlo had bravely made the attempt to go out, not so much to the rescue of the crew of the wrecked vessel as to be near to help Pearl should harm befall her.

Bitterly he cursed his fate, and had only put back when every one of his crew told him they would go no further.

Meanwhile the Scud had made the run, and her last tack had taken her up under the lee of the wreck on the rocks.

But she had swung off before a line could be cast, and once more had to come round and make another perilous approach in order to reach those she wished to rescue.

Again it was a failure, for the furious winds and waves drove the Scud off again, and it seemed to those on the Point, for blue lights were constantly burned, that the Scud would be swamped in her wearing around on her runs back to the lee of the vessel.

Every eye upon the Point was upon the daring little craft, and they could see that Pearl stood at the tiller with a stalwart form by her side, while the four other men of the crew were forward, ready to obey any order of their girl captain, who had influenced them to go to the rescue, for she had picked her men, the bravest young lads of the settlement, and to whom she had gone individually and asked them to aid her in doing what even Marlo had refused to attempt.

As the little schooner headed up under the lee of the wreck for the third time, her decks swept by the foaming waters, a cry broke from every lip of those upon the Point as a form was seen to spring over the bulwarks of the vessel and strike out for the Scud, a rope fast about his waist.

"Brave fellow! his act will save them all," cried Captain Karl with admiration at the daring of the one who thus sought to reach the schooner with a line.

CHAPTER VIII.

A VERITABLE HERO.

I WILL now return to the young runaway, Ralph Rollo, who risked his life to fly from England, after having shot down Sir Gurney Gladden and Barney the gamekeeper at Harcourt Hall.

It will be remembered that he had faced successfully the storms he encountered, and at last, utterly worn out he had gone to sleep at the tiller of the stanch craft and been awakened with a hail from a vessel bearing down upon him.

He had answered the hail, but over-work, loss of rest and hardship had made their impress upon him and when taken on board the ship he was too ill to tell aught about himself.

There was nothing for the kind-hearted captain to do but to take from the craft all he found of value, scuttle her and then go on his way.

The ship's destination was China, and all that could be done for the sick boy was gladly done by the captain and his crew.

After days of illness Ralph rallied and in a couple of weeks was on deck once more.

He had told a story to the captain of how he lived on the English coast, had gone on board the craft he was taken from, with the intention of making a voyage, and while the skipper was ashore had been blown out to sea.

He asked the captain to let him ship before the mast on his vessel and thus earn a little money.

The captain made him cabin-boy instead, and when the good ship after a long run arrived in a Chinese port Ralph had a little sum in wages to add to his purse of gold.

From China the vessel went to Australia

and thence to Valparaiso and there the captain was taken ill and died.

With his good friend and benefactor gone Ralph left the ship and went on board a vessel bound to Monte Video, and thence shipped on another vessel whose destination was San Francisco, a place the boy was anxious to visit, for he had read much of the United States and intended to there find a refuge and carve out his fortune, building up for himself new friendships and a home.

"I will arrive in San Francisco, if the wind holds good, just two years to the day from my leaving home, and strange to say upon my sixteenth birthday."

"I feel like a man now, and am doing a man's work, for I get the pay of a first-class seaman."

"I have saved my money and will have all of seven hundred dollars laid by to start life on in the United States."

"Ah, me! How the shadow hangs over me, go where I may, and amid what scenes I do, of that terrible twilight deed in Harcourt Hall, when I killed Sir Gurney Gladden and Barney the gamekeeper."

"They intended to kill me, it is true, and I shot in self-defense; but then I had no witnesses, and I am afraid they would have hanged me."

"But no one will track me here to the United States, and then I will have grown so in another year those who knew me in England would not recognize me."

"Ho, the deck."

"Ay, ay; the foretop."

"A sail dead ahead, sir, and she seems to be bringing a storm with her."

"Ay, ay; you are right, lad."

"All hands on deck," answered the officer on watch.

Ralph had been musing in the foretop, where he was stationed on duty, for he held the place as first-class seaman, young as he was, on a fine barque bound from Havana to San Francisco.

He was a perfect giant for strength, cool as an icicle in danger, was a thorough sailor, and would go aloft when few men dared follow him.

He had grown much since he had become a runaway, his face had darkened, and indicated great intelligence, fearlessness and thought.

All that he had passed through had made a man of him, and his early life of refining influences had enabled him to the better appreciate his position.

Educated as well as a boy of his years could be, he won the hearts of his shipmates by reading to them, writing their letters and in many kindly acts showing that he possessed a heart full of feeling and sympathy.

He had also won the respect and regard of his officers by his strict devotion to duty, and it was whispered that he would step in as third mate when a vacancy occurred, for he appeared older than his years.

Such was the young runaway, as sailor of the barque Rainbow, nearing the port of San Francisco.

As his keen eyes caught sight of the strange sail, they also discerned that the horizon in that direction was most threatening.

Looking more steadily toward the storm, he took the liberty of again hailing the officer on duty.

"Ho! the deck!"

"Ay, ay, the foretop!"

"I think, sir, there is a hurricane sweeping down upon us from leeward, for the sail is already shut out from view, and sky and sea look angry and ugly in that direction."

"Ay, ay, lad; we will be ready for it," answered the officer, yet he failed to take any immediate precautions and allowed the barque to hold on under clouds of canvas, contenting himself with having the crew on deck.

But, Ralph grew more and more anxious, as he saw the storm-cloud skurrying toward them. He could see from aloft far more than the confident officer on the deck could, and so once again he hailed the deck.

CHAPTER IX.

TO SAVE OTHERS.

"Ho the deck!" cried Ralph for the third time.

"What is it now, lookout?" impatiently called out the officer of the deck.

"I beg pardon, sir, but I wish to call your attention to the storm."

"You have done so, sir!"

"Yes, sir, but the clouds above seem all in a whirl, and those to the seaward are most threatening, while the sea is very mild."

"It looks very ugly for the ship, sir!"

"Silence, sir!" cried the officer in a tone of anger, and yet he could not but take notice of the situation.

The wind that was driving the barque along at a six-knot rate came from off the land, which was some ten leagues away.

Night was coming on, and almost since Ralph's first hail the skies had become overcast.

Seaward the horizon was black as ink, and the storm was coming up against the land-breeze.

A glance overhead showed that there were several currents, and clouds were going around as in a whirlwind, while others were driving in opposite directions.

As he looked the officer heard the roar of the coming storm, and for the first time he began to feel that there was cause for alarm, for the ship was one mass of canvas.

He hated to yield to Ralph's advice after having reproved him, but his discretion and fear got the better of his feelings, for as third mate, he had heard that it was the captain's intention to put the young sailor in his place when they arrived in port, as, though a good sailor he was given to dissipation.

Though it cut him to do so, he at last saw that he could delay no longer, so sung out in a voice that sent the crew flying to obey:

"All hands aloft to take in canvas."

"Strip her clean, lads, down to storm-sails, for we are going to have a nasty blow!"

The men were on the alert for the order, for they all saw that the young sailor was right.

They worked with a will, and were constantly hurried by their captain and other officers who had just finished supper and come on deck to discover with amazement the rapid change in the weather.

But, fast as the men worked, they were not quick enough, for they started in too late.

The storm was upon them with a wild roar, an irresistible avalanche of wind and waters, and the good ship, though luffed sharp to meet it, was struck with a fury that tore her canvas to ribbons, snapped her spars and brought down her towering masts to the deck.

Half a dozen poor fellows went over into the sea, but others slipped down stays to the deck, and among these was sailor Ralph.

He seized an ax, untold, and with others the wreckage was soon chopped loose. Then the ship righted and the storm appeared to have spent its fury.

But, the tardy officer and others had been swept away to death.

Still the crew worked with a will, for all said that the storm was not over.

Jury masts, were rigged, and the barque tried to beat off-shore toward which she had been driven.

But again the storm came, as though that which had passed had been but a fore-runner, or warning, and the winds were

more savage than before, while the waves ran most furiously and men peered into each others' faces with looks of anxiety they could not conceal.

"If the mate had only taken your advice, lad," said an old sailor to Ralph.

"I feared trouble when I saw those inky clouds, and gave warning; but he hated to be told his duty, I suppose, by a common sailor. Poor fellow, he was about the first to go," answered Ralph.

"The captain wishes to see you, mate," said a sailor coming forward.

Ralph went aft at once.

Captain Bracebridge had heard the truth from two or three old privileged tars, and so he said:

"Ralph, I am sorry the warning you gave Officer Paulding was not heeded sooner, and, as it is, had the ship been caught under full sail she would have gone to the bottom."

"Take the place of Third Mate Paulding, sir, until further instructions."

Ralph was astounded, though pleased.

Yet he said:

"I thank you, Captain Bracebridge, for the honor, sir, but there are older seamen on board, than I, and—"

"There are no better, sir, if older seamen. Do as I order you."

Ralph bowed and obeyed, going to his post like one who knew just what was expected of him.

He soon had his hands full in attending to his duties, and yet it was not long before he saw that his position was short-lived, the ship was driving ashore.

"There are lights ashore, sir, and, if we could get a pilot off, sir, perhaps, we might make a haven," he said to the captain.

"Fire the gun then for one to come off," was the reply and one of the two six-pounders on board began its cry for help.

But all in vain, as has been seen, for the good ship, a wreck now, was driven shoreward to strike upon the reef.

Others of her crew went overboard when she struck, but most of them held on, and there clung until the little schooner stood out to their aid.

When at last no line could reach her, Ralph the Runaway made a rope fast about his waist and sprung into the sea.

He was a superb swimmer, and risked his life to save his shipmates from death, for all knew that the wreck must soon go to pieces.

CHAPTER X.

THE RESCUE.

WHEN Ralph jumped into the sea he felt that it was the only means to save his shipmates, as the wreck was being rapidly pounded to pieces.

He knew that, without a heavy line about his waist, he could reach the schooner, perhaps manage to get ashore if he missed the little craft, if the landing was not too rugged.

But could he get a line on board the little schooner he would be able to haul a cable to her which would hold her fast until the men could reach her decks by means of a block and swing.

He leaped into the sea just at the right time to catch the Scud as she came up again, and ready hands were forward to grasp his own and haul him on board.

All, by aid of the burning lights, watched his way intently and soon he hailed in a cheery tone:

"Now, lads, your line!"

A rope was thrown from the schooner, Ralph caught it, and, a moment after, was on board!

The schooner was still eating up nearer and nearer the reef, but before she had to go about, a cable was drawn out from the wreck, by means of the rope brought by the bold mariner, and this big rope was soon made fast.

"Lower away all sail!" now cried Ralph. Down came jib and mainsail, and the schooner was brought up by the stout cable, under the lee of the wreck.

She plunged terribly but the cable held, and then the crew of the Rainbow began to come, one at a time, down the stout line to the schooner's deck.

The first man had to manage the block himself, and several times, when the schooner gave a plunge, it was thought he was lost; but he held on, and a wild yell of joy went up as he reached the deck in safety.

Another line was then rigged to the block and swing, which was hauled back on board the wreck and a second seaman began the perilous voyage.

It was made in safety, and the cheer of the two crews was echoed from Point Desolation by the people gathered there.

Long and perilous work it was, to rescue the crew one by one, and over an hour passed, the sea seeming to grow wilder the while, the winds fiercer, as though angry at the escape of their intended prey.

The captain was the last to leave his ship, and he had to work his own way, no one being left to man the check line on the vessel.

He knew that he did not leave a moment too soon, for the wreck was working and shivering terribly beneath his feet.

He hailed the schooner as he came near and said:

"Raise sail and stand ready to cut the line, for in a minute more all that wreckage will be hurled upon you!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" came the cheery response of Ralph and he turned to the crew about him. The jib alone was set, as before such a hurricane any more canvas might run the little craft under.

The anxiety of all on board now was intense.

The rescued crew had been sent aft, for fear the extra weight on the bows of a score of men might cause her to plunge under, never to rise.

Calm as any of the men, Pearl stood by the tiller, and left others to do the work. Her strength would be of little avail then, while her example of calm courage was of the greatest use.

She had gone forward and greeted Ralph the Runaway as he came on board, and said in her sweet way:

"I congratulate you, sir, and I hope your shipmates will be as successful as you."

"If so, they owe their lives to you."

Ralph gazed at the young girl in wonder and admiration.

Who was she, and what could she be doing there?

He saw that the schooner was small, yet stanch, and that her crew was small.

But she had dared come out to the rescue of those who needed her aid, and it looked to him as though the young girl was captain.

"You understand this work, sir, so we will leave it to you," she added.

When he again looked for her, she was gone, and he saw her back by the tiller, cool and watchful.

Her crew stood ready to aid him, and they nobly did it.

At last the captain was on board, and before coming he had lighted another blue light, which illumined the scene round about as the sunlight would have done.

Those on the schooner could see that the wreck was writhing terribly, and that there was no time to lose all knew.

If a huge wave should break through the stout ship, then tons of wreckage would be driven over the reef and hurled upon the little schooner.

If caught thus among the debris, she might be stove in, and death come to all.

As the captain's foot touched the deck, the jib was set and the ax in the hands of Ralph fell upon the strained cable.

Instantly the schooner swung around before the wind, and hardly had she done so when, with a mighty crash the entire wreck came in fragments over the reef.

"Just in time!" said the captain, and he turned to watch the schooner, which was wallowing deep and driving shoreward at terrific speed.

The blue light had been extinguished. All was pitch darkness now, and the question was would the gallant little schooner stand the strain to which she was put?

Had they been rescued from the wreck, but to go down with the schooner?

CHAPTER XI.

WATCHING AND WAITING.

THE feelings of the people upon Point Desolation may be more readily realized than described, in watching the scenes out at the reef, upon which lay the barque being pounded to pieces.

Especially did Captain Karl and his wife suffer, for there was their only child, their loved Pearl, who had placed her own life in jeopardy and the lives of those who had gone with her to the rescue.

Marlo had been driven back in his vessel, and yet there was a thought in the mind of Captain Karl that had his brave young daughter taken the craft of the young sailor, by some means she would have accomplished all that she had thus far done.

He knew that it was the indomitable pluck of the child which had forced the crew of his vessel to hold on, she accomplishing what Marlo could not do.

The lights burned on the barque had revealed the terrible situation to all upon the rocks, and with prayers upon the lips of some they watched and waited for the end.

They had seen one brave seaman leap into the sea and swim for the schooner.

That he had been picked up, that a line had been made fast to the little vessel and one by one the crew had been taken on board all had witnessed.

Then had followed the running up of the jib, the severing of the cable and the swinging around of the schooner, just as a wave larger and more savage than the others came to tear the barque into pieces.

Total darkness had followed, and then, blinded by the light suddenly being extinguished, no one could see for over a minute.

The eyes of Captain Karl were dim from having gazed so long and earnestly through his glass.

But after a while the sea became visible with its white waves, and all eyes were strained to catch a glimpse of the schooner.

Baffled in his attempt to go out after the schooner, Marlo had returned to the Point in an angry mood.

"I was a fool to attempt it," he said, almost savagely.

"Yet, the Pearl of the Sea went," an old woman remarked when all others were silent.

"Some angel guards that girl. She did it through no skill of herself or crew," hotly returned the young sailor.

"She is sure to accomplish what she undertakes, be it on land or sea," declared the same old woman, who was known in the settlement as Mother Magic.

Mother Magic, was, in truth, a strange character, and where some of the most superstitious called her a witch, others admitted that she possessed wonderful powers of a supernatural kind.

She was a fortune-teller, and more, she appeared alone in the world, with no kindred.

She had a cabin away off to herself, and with parrots, monkeys, cats and a dog for pets, seemed content.

She always dressed in red, wearing a scarlet sombrero upon her head, and which was encircled by a dry, stuffed rattlesnake as a hat-band.

Her hair was as white as snow and hung in three wavy braids down her back, reaching to her knees, while her face was dark and fascinating, for her eyes seemed to look into one's very soul.

"You say an angel guards the child, Marlo," she sneered in answer to his words.

"Yes."

"It is not so."

"What then?"

"The child came and asked me if she dared go and I said yes, and bade the winds and waves to harm her not."

"You have that power, you assert?"

"Yes, boy, and you who scoffed at my power failed to do what a mere girl did."

"You are a fool, as well as a boy, Marlo."

The young sailor muttered an imprecation but made no reply.

He soon moved away from the strange woman whose words caused those about her to gaze upon her with more respect and dread than before.

Her words caught the ears of the anxious mother of Pearl, and drawing nearer she said in her low, sweet way, in which there was much anxiety:

"Mother Magic, if you have the power, tell me if my child will return to me in safety."

"She will."

"But where is her vessel?"

"There on the wild waters!" and the woman pointed down upon the storm-swept sea.

"Yes, but no one has been able to catch sight of the schooner since she left the wreck."

"It is because their eyes have not the power of mine."

"Come, look just where I tell you, Mistress Karl, there! do you not see her?"

"I do not."

"Look again, just where I point."

"Ah! I see her now! but she has no sail set!"

"No; she is scudding under bare poles."

"And running for a haven?"

"Yes."

"But not our harbor?"

"She cannot make it, so will head up the inlet to get under the lee of the bend and there await the end of the tempest."

"The schooner will live then?"

"Said I not so?"

"But see! they are setting sail and she heads for the harbor."

"Then the one who commands her actions knows that the schooner can make the run in in safety."

A cheer followed this discovery of the little schooner, and every eye was strained in watching the little vessel rush on her way toward the harborage which she had left some hours before to go out to the rescue.

[CHAPTER XII.

SAFE IN PORT.

WHEN the schooner put around on its run back to the harbor Ralph made his way aft and took up position near the young girl and the stout young fellow who stood near the tiller.

"I will work the schooner now, sir, with my own crew, for we know these waters best, and our little craft also," said Pearl, to the young sailor.

Ralph bowed and after a word to the captain of the wrecked barque the men were placed along each side of the schooner, while the crew of the little vessel took up position to obey the slightest order given them.

With her jib bellied out like a balloon far ahead, and pulling with a force that would have dragged a full-rigged ship along, the schooner went flying along at a pace so terrific that Pearl called out:

"We must take in that jib, boys."

"Yes, and scud under bare poles," answered

the man at the tiller, and whose strength there was needed.

A word then to his crew and the sail was hauled down and held to the deck by the weight of the men, until it should be needed again.

On drove the schooner like a mad racer, and, without canvas, was not seen by those on the rocks for some time.

She held toward the Point, but it soon became evident that without canvas she must be driven to the other shore of the inlet.

Seeing this the jib was again set, but reefed down, and the mainsail was raised so as to get steerageway upon her when the bow was brought around and headed for the harborage.

As she heeled well upon her beam under the pressure, the crew and those they had rescued all went to windward, thus serving as a counteracting ballast against the wind.

Thus she drove along for nearly a mile, seemingly about to go over or lose her sticks every instant, until after a fearful lurch that made every heart stand still, she shot in under the lee of the earthen arm which formed the basin where the Point Desolation fleet were at anchor, and tugging nervously at their chains even in that secure harborage.

Straight on to the little wharf she headed, the young girl now having the tiller alone, for the crew wished to have her hold the honor of bringing the schooner in, and as she neared her destination two piles of pine fagots were set on fire and blazing up brightly illumined the haven and its rugged shores.

There lay the little fleet at anchor, and astern of the schooner the storm-lashed inlet.

Without, the roar of the waves and howling of the winds was deafening while ashore was grouped the entire settlement, come down from their homes to welcome back the daring Pearl of the Sea and the brave young sailor who had dared death with her.

They also wished to welcome the shipwrecked crew and extend to them every kindness and courtesy, thus belying the report that they were merciless wreckers who sought gain through the destruction of some gallant ship and the loss of her crew.

A wild, weird, picturesque sight it was, with that gathering of several hundred souls dressed in strange garb and watching the coming schooner, the haven, the rocks, the people and all lighted up by the glare of the blazing fagots.

Nearer and nearer drew the schooner, Pearl Kenton standing at the tiller, her hair blowing wildly about her in spite of its being dripping wet, and Captain Bracebridge upon one side of her, Ralph the Runaway upon the other.

The schooner's own crew stood at their posts, awaiting orders, and the rescued men were standing along the windward bulwark watching the strange scene.

As the schooner came within a cable's length of the wharf a voice call out:

"Three cheers for the Pearl of the Sea!"

They were given with a will, the voices of women and children mingling in a grand cheer with the hoarse tones of the men.

The women waved their kerchiefs also, while the men swung their caps and hats again and again around their heads.

The rescued crew, though they had heard nothing as yet to indicate who was meant by the Pearl of the Sea, at once turned their eyes upon the little maiden at the tiller of the schooner, for the cheer told them that she was the one who had forced men to dare death to save them.

They saw her wave her hand, then devote her attention to her work, and with an order to the crew, run her vessel alongside of the wharf with a skill that showed she was no novice at the helm.

Her sails had been carried away just in

time, and the headway of the schooner carried her alongside of the wharf without a shock.

Willing hands made her fast, and as Pearl sprung ashore she was infolded in her father's arms while from his lips came the words:

"My brave, my noble girl.

"This night will never be forgotten by you."

Then she found her mother's arms about her and listened to words of praise for her courage mingled with gentle reproach at her having so distressed them all.

"I believed it could be done, mother—that the crew could be saved, and the boys I asked to go with me in the Scud never failed me. We did the work as you see, which Marlo refused to attempt."

"Poor Marlo did attempt to follow you but his vessel was driven back, my child, by the fury of the tempest."

"He should have led, not followed, mother.

"He should have gone with me", was the reply of the brave girl, and Marlo heard her words.

CHAPTER XIII.

AFTER THE STORM.

HAVING greeted his loved daughter as he did, and given her into her mother's keeping, Captain Karl at once turned to the crew of the Scud and said:

"Well done, my brave lads! We will remember this night's glorious work."

Then he stepped forward and greeted Captain Bracebridge, who, with Ralph Rollo, just then stepped ashore from the schooner's deck.

"My dear, sir, I am glad to welcome you, your officers and men, to our coast settlement, which, though known as Point Desolation, will extend to you a warm greeting and cordial hospitality:

"I congratulate you all upon your escape, and yet fear you mourn the loss of a number of your brave comrades."

"Yes, sir, we do, for only about half of my crew were saved, this young man, acting as third mate, being my only officer left.

"Let me introduce myself, sir, as Brent Bracebridge, captain of the American barque Rainbow, from Havana to San Francisco, and this is my third mate, Ralph Rollo, to whose courage, with that of your brave young daughter and her crew, we owe our lives, and a more perilous and daring rescue than that little craft was made to perform, was never undertaken."

Captain Bracebridge spoke feelingly, and warmly grasped the hand of Captain Karl, who also extended a warm welcome to the young sailor, with the remark:

"Was it not you, sir, that sprung into the sea with the line to swim to the schooner?"

"I had that pleasure, sir."

"It was a gallant act, sir."

"It was nothing, sir, compared with the coming out in the teeth of such a hurricane on that schooner.

"May we offer our grateful acknowledgments now, sir, to the brave little lady who was the guardian angel of that dangerous run, and splendid rescue?"

Ralph spoke with the ease of one raised in polite society, and Captain Karl at once led the barque's commander and the young sailor to the spot where his wife and daughter stood, and presented them.

The rescued sailors crowded after them, and Pearl found her hand warmly grasped by all of those who owed their lives to her, and blushed under the words of praise showered upon her by hearts full of gratitude.

The wrecked men were quickly cared for in the hospitable houses of the coasters, Captain Karl taking the barque's commander and Ralph the Runaway to his

home, where they were soon supplied with dry clothing and food.

Excepting his belt of gold, buckled about his waist, Ralph had lost his all, as had the rest of those upon the barque; but all had managed to cling to their money.

When in the light of the cabin the coaster captain, his wife and Pearl saw the brave young sailor, they discovered that he was really nothing more than a boy in years, though he had a man's strength, experience and courage.

He talked well, saying nothing of himself, and his own captain was surprised at finding he had been served in the forecabin by a young gentleman.

"Had the unfortunate mate Paulding taken the warning given him by Master Rollo, he would have saved the barque, for, stripped of her canvas she would not have lost her sticks and we could have beaten off there after we had met the first fury of the gale," said Captain Bracebridge, as they all sat together in the comfortable cabin home of the coaster captain.

Then they began to discuss the going out of Pearl to the rescue, and Captain Bracebridge added:

"How did you manage it, little lady?"

"I depended upon Marlo, sir, for he is the most daring of all young men; but he said it was useless to make the attempt, so I went to those whom I felt I could trust and told them to meet me at the shore.

"They were all there and I told them I was going out to the relief of the barque's crew."

"Did they not try to dissuade you, for they all must have known the danger?"

"Oh yes, sir, and one threatened to tell my father, but I told him I had never seen a tell-tale who was not a coward, and he at once said he would go with me.

"The others said the same, and I knew they only urged me not to go for my own sake.

"Well, I was terribly frightened when I got out of the harbor and saw just what I had done, but I would not turn back if I died for it.

"I had been out in ugly storms before, but that was something I had never dreamed of.

"We went out though, and by helping at the tiller I kept my courage up, though it nearly failed me when we could not make fast to the barque.

"When you sprung into the sea, sir, and swam toward us, do you know I no longer felt a fear, for something told me we were safe then, that all had not been risked for nothing."

This compliment to Ralph, told in the modest sweet way of Pearl, caused the young sailor to blush like a girl, but he said:

"It was then, miss, that I began to feel fear, seeing you, a mere girl, on board the schooner.

"But we got through all right, and we all owe to you our lives."

As it was late the captain suggested that they should retire, for they were to rise early and seek for the dead forms cast ashore along with the wreckage.

The morning dawned bright and beautiful; the sea had run down into gentle waves; the wind blew balmy off the shore and one could hardly realize the difference in the scene from the night before.

After an early breakfast all set forth to search for the dead and give them proper burial.

CHAPTER XIV.

RALPH'S RESOLVE.

CAST here and there, upon the rocks and sandy shore, driven up the inlet and thrown out upon the white beach were found the forms of a score of the unfortunate barque's crew who had met their fate in the storm.

There too was wreckage in vast quantities, merchandise in boxes and barrels, and the coasters found the harvest a fine one for them, for the barque had been well laden with everything the settlement could desire in the way of clothing, food and household wares.

The dead were buried up the inlet, in the settlement burying-ground, and the wreckage was gathered and placed in the large store-house on the shore for the good of all.

Then the barque's captain signified his wish to go on to San Francisco to report the loss of his vessel, and when he could get another to command, or start home with his crew.

Captain Karl at once said that he would sail them up to Frisco, and the Scud and the Sea Pearl, Marlo's craft, were ordered ready for the run.

Since the night of the storm Marlo had appeared in an ugly mood.

Pearl had accomplished what he had failed to do, and it was she who had saved the life of Ralph Rollo, whom the sharp-eyed Marlo almost fiercely hated the moment his eyes fell upon him.

Marlo was only too glad, then, to get the wrecked seamen away from the settlement.

Since Pearl was a girl of ten he had loved her and made up his mind that she should be his wife when she was old enough to marry.

She had seemed more drawn toward him than to any one else, and he was her willing slave, obeying her in everything, and the little maiden seemed to rejoice in her power over him.

When Ralph came, Marlo at once saw a dangerous rival in him, and he was anxious to get rid of him.

But before the wrecked crew sailed, Captain Karl took Captain Bracebridge and Ralph on a visit to his ranch with him.

Mrs. Karl and Pearl were to go along, also, and when the horses were brought in from the pasture Marlo stood near with a sarcastic smile upon his face, hoping to see Ralph to make a show of himself when he attempted to ride.

Instead, the young man leaped lightly into the saddle and showed that he felt perfectly at home there.

It was an enjoyable trip to Ralph, for he loved just such a life as he could live upon a ranch, and all the way back he was very thoughtful, and as he rode by the side of Pearl had little to say.

The next morning at daybreak they set sail for Frisco, Captain Karl, Ralph and a couple of the sailors going upon the Scud with Captain Karl and his family, for his wife and daughter accompanied him.

The rest of the crew went on the Sea Pearl with Marlo, who congratulated himself that Ralph would soon be out of his way.

The evening of the second day the Scud stood in through the Golden Horn and the lights of the city arose before them.

Forward, watching their approach, sat Pearl and Ralph, while the elders were talking aft and the crew grouped amidships.

At last Pearl spoke, and her words were low and regretful:

"So you will start home to-morrow, I suppose?"

"I have no home, Pearl."

"You have no home?" she asked with surprise.

"No home, miss."

"Nowhere?"

"Not anywhere."

"Where are your parents?"

"Dead."

"And your brothers, and sisters?"

"I have none."

"How sad."

"I am all alone in the world."

"But you had a home once?"

"None that I could call my own, for I

was picked up at sea in an open boat and a gentleman adopted me.

"Then I ran away and went to sea, so you see I have no home, no kindred I know of."

"Then where are you going when you land in Frisco?"

"I do not know."

"The captain told father that he would make you an officer on the next vessel he commanded."

"Yes, he is very kind to me."

"Do you not wish to go to sea again?"

"Frankly, I do not."

"What will you do then?"

"I have some money saved up and intended to seek a living ashore."

"Ralph?" and Pearl spoke as from a sudden inspiration.

"Yes, Pearl."

"I don't wish you to go, and father said that he wished he had just such a son as you are, so I know he will adopt you, and mother will be delighted I am sure, for she likes you ever so much."

"But I am a perfect stranger to them, Pearl."

"That makes no difference, for we will soon know each other."

"Just say you'll go back with us and I'll arrange it all."

"Oh can you, Pearl?" was the eager question.

"I can," came the confident reply, "if you will say that you will stay."

"I will gladly do so, Pearl."

"Then that settles it, and you will have a home, and parents and I will be your sister."

"Now we'll tell father and mother," and she led him aft to where her parents sat with Captain Bracebridge.

CHAPTER XV.

RIVALS.

THE Sea Pearl was following in the wake of the Scud, and both were fleet vessels, dashing swiftly along at an eight-knot pace.

As they neared the city, Marlo was congratulating himself that he would soon be rid of the youth who had stepped between himself and his sweetheart, as he was pleased to put it.

"A couple of hours more and I'll be rid of him," he muttered with a smile of intense satisfaction.

But what would have been his feelings had he known what was going on upon the decks of the Scud.

There Pearl had led the youth, Marlo's rival, as he was sure that he was, back to where her parents were conversing with Captain Bracebridge, while all were admiring the approach to the city.

"Father, I have come to tell you something," she said in her sweet way.

"Well, Pearl?"

"I have been talking to Master Ralph."

"Yes."

"And he says that he has no home, no kindred, and was picked up at sea in an open boat by a gentleman cruising in his yacht off the English coast."

"He was a little fellow then, and a couple of years ago he ran away and went to sea."

"So he did not know what he intended to do, or where to go, and I told him that you said to mamma that you wished you had just such a son as Ralph, and I am sure I want him for a brother, so I told him to go back with us and he would have a home and you and mamma would be a father and mother to him."

"Now, did I not do right?"

There was no resisting this appeal, and Captain Bracebridge laughed and said:

"You will have to strike your flag captain, for as much as I would like to have Ralph with me, the future is uncertain for me and I would be glad to feel that he was under your care."

"And I say that Ralph is most welcome to our home," Mrs. Kenton said with a smile,

holding out her hand to the youth, who bent over and kissed it with the manner of a courtier.

"What my wife and daughter wish is my pleasure to do; so, Master Ralph, just consider that you go back with us and make our home your own, yes, and be as our adopted son, for frankly I feel that we shall have reason some day to be proud of you."

"You are heartily welcome, my lad, and I will make you captain of the Scud and let you also look after affairs at the ranch, when you are ashore, which will be more than half your time."

"Here is my hand upon it, my lad."

The youth grasped the outstretched hand and said in a voice that was full of emotion:

"I thank you, sir."

"You are all so good to me, and I hope to prove my appreciation of your kindness."

"You are to be congratulated, Ralph," Captain Bracebridge said.

And then he added:

"I offer you my warmest wishes for the future, but should you ever wish to sail deep water again, I will give you my address and you can write me, for I will make a berth for you I promise you."

"Didn't I tell you I'd arrange it, Ralph?" said Pearl, in a tone of triumph.

"Yes, and you did arrange it, little sister."

"Call me Pearl, for though I've adopted you as my brother it is just as well that we call each other Ralph and Pearl."

"Just as you say, Pearl."

"But what will your many admirers think, Marlo, for instance?"

"Now, Ralph, I would not wound one of them; but they must let me do as I deem best."

"I love every lad in the settlement, but they cannot all be my brothers, can they?"

"No," dryly said Ralph, and he added:

"It struck me that none of them cared to be your brothers."

"What then?"

"Your lovers?"

"Well, I am no Mormon, and besides I am too young to think of love, and they are foolish if they take me for a sweetheart, are they not, Ralph?"

"Well, yes, but then one cannot always control his affections, Pearl."

"One must," was the determined reply of the little maiden.

Soon after a landing was made and the Sea Pearl ran alongside the Scud after a wait of a few minutes.

As it was early in the evening Captain Bracebridge determined to seek quarters at once for himself and men, and to report first thing in the morning to the agents to whom his ship had been consigned.

Captain Karl decided to remain over the next day, for Mrs. Kenton to do some shopping, and also to get certain things that were needed at the settlement, so he escorted the commander of the barque up-town accompanied by Ralph who was to return with him on board the Scud.

Marlo came on board the Scud as they departed, not understanding the situation, and said very emphatically to Pearl:

"Well, that ends it."

"Ends what, Marlo?"

"He is gone."

"Who is gone?"

"That lubber Ralph."

"Oh, no, he is not."

"What do you mean?"

"He has just been adopted into our family, as my parents' son and my brother, and he goes back with us to our home to live."

Marlo uttered an oath between his shut teeth and then asked almost savagely:

"Do you mean what you say, Pearl Kenton?"

"I certainly do."

"Well, he has stayed just for your sake,

and that means that he intends to come between me and you; but I am not one to be thwarted in what I plan to accomplish, so that fellow will find he has a foe in Marlo the Coaster that he will have cause to fear."

With this the angry young sailor sprang back on board his own vessel and began to pace to and fro with rapid strides.

CHAPTER XVI.

ON THE DOWN GRADE.

A YEAR passed by and changes had come upon the little settlement on the rugged coast of Point Desolation.

Ralph the Runaway had returned in the Scud, and Captain Karl had made him sailing-master of her, a position he filled with perfect satisfaction, for his courage, skill and intelligence, all, had powerfully impressed the chief.

Though Marlo had sought to turn the young sailors against him, he had been successful in securing the very best ones for his crew and soon had his little schooner in most perfect condition.

If on a voyage down the coast after shells, the Scud was sure to get the best and largest number, above all the other vessels of the fleet.

If on a fishing-voyage the Scud got the largest freight.

In a run to and from port the Scud led the fleet, and the Sea Pearl was invariably close in her wake, but defeated.

When the people went up to the cattle-ranches, where Marlo expected to prove his superiority as a rider, lasso-thrower and hunter, Ralph still proved to be the victor, learning what he did not know with a quickness and perfection which was wonderful.

All the while the nature of Marlo was becoming more morose and he was getting dissipated and more reckless than ever.

He still haunted Pearl as before, but he was always anxious to say mean things to her.

Upon her part Pearl never shunned him, never lost her temper, was ever smiling and cheery when with him and welcomed him in the same friendly manner as before the coming of Ralph.

All the people could see the cause of Marlo's actions, and yet no one could blame Ralph, who had become most popular with every one excepting the clique of the young skipper of the Sea Pearl.

At last Marlo began to go off on cruises alone. He no longer fished, but yet often was seen in the port of San Francisco, and spent his money in revelry.

He had trebled his crew until he had a score of men under him, and one morning put into the harbor to the surprise of all with a beautiful schooner-yacht which he said he had purchased from a gentleman who had sailed in it to San Francisco from New York and then sold it for a small sum.

He at once painted the yacht black, named her the Defiance, and changing her rig somewhat, challenged Ralph to race him in the Scud.

As the craft of Marlo had been sold, and the new vessel did not bear the name of the old, Ralph at once asked Captain Karl for permission to call the Scud the Sea Pearl.

This was given him and he accepted the challenge at once, got his crew at work on his schooner, changed her rig somewhat, putting in topmasts some feet taller than the old ones, and adding to her bowsprit and spars length sufficient to increase her sail over a third more.

All the settlement took position upon the rocks to see the race, which was to be thirty miles in the shape of a triangle.

The Defiance led at the start and for the first ten miles, the Sea Pearl steadily gaining though slowly.

When half-over the second ten miles the Sea Pearl hauled alongside of the craft of

Marlo, Ralph going by to leeward, thus allowing his rival advantages.

Just as the last ten miles was reached, and which was to be a beat to windward with a stiff breeze blowing, the Sea Pearl passed the Defiance and led her home easily, running to her anchorage ten minutes ahead of her adversary.

All of the settlement were delighted to see the old boat beat, excepting those who belonged to the Marlo set.

After this Marlo set sail for a long cruise, and months after he returned without his vessel, his crew and himself coming back in a coaster.

He reported losing his vessel at sea, and with her three of his men.

"I am sick of the sea and shall go upon the ranch," he said, to Captain Karl.

Several days after he went into the mountains, and one by one his crew left the settlement to join him.

As has been said the coasters had ranches back from the shore, and thither Marlo and his crew had gone to act as cowboys for the cattle belonging to the settlement in common.

He showed the same ugly spirit before he left as before, and never noticed the existence of Ralph, unless it was to challenge him for a race, a trial of strength or skill in a sail, rowing-race, swimming-match or ride, and in each, when he faced the Runaway, he was defeated.

Captain Karl had found Ralph a most valuable ally.

He had discovered in the young stranger, as we have said, sterling traits of character, and both he and his wife had learned to love him as dearly as they would their own son.

They saw all that he bore from Marlo, and were pleased at his forbearance.

They did not wish to see a rupture in the settlement, and Ralph's coolness and patience alone prevented it.

Captain Karl had had several talks with Marlo, telling him that he was becoming reckless of the authority which he was pledged to acknowledge and respect, and urging him to change from his wild, reckless ways.

But the young sailor had paid no heed to the warning, and when at last he lost his vessel and went to the ranches, the captain was glad of it, and hoped that he would change for the better, until several days after, when Ralph returned from San Francisco, bringing a bundle of newspapers, from which Captain Karl made a very startling discovery.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DISCOVERY.

WHENEVER Ralph went up to Frisco, he was sure to bring all of the latest newspapers to Captain Karl, the magazines and fashion journals to Mrs. Kenton, and books and presents to Pearl.

He managed to study in spite of his duties, and was trying to learn all that he could, both the captain and Mrs. Kenton being his teachers.

The wreckage, and what was not needed by the coasters, of the cargo, was sold in San Francisco, and brought a good price, which was turned into the common treasury for the good of all, and Ralph had managed the sales with great tact, and won the thanks of every one by so doing.

His actions had spurred on the young men to greater exertions, idleness was not thought of, and the settlement had never been in a more prosperous condition, the only shadow upon it being the thought of many that Marlo was on the downward grade, and was leading others with him over whom he had a strange and wonderful influence.

When he retired to the mountains, better things were expected of him.

As for Ralph, no one knew aught more

regarding him than he had told of himself; but there were many who felt sure that he had a history he had not divulged, and that there was some mystery hanging over him.

So matters were when Ralph returned from a run in the Sea Pearl, bringing with him the papers spoken of in which Captain Karl had made an important discovery.

The youth's home had been with the family of Captain Karl, though he slept on board his vessel, and he was indeed treated like one who was in reality a son and brother.

He brought something for Mrs. Kenton, and as was his custom, some pretty presents for Pearl.

The captain was happy with his papers, for he was a great reader and always glad to keep up with the news of the world.

So he scanned them over while the others chatted together, Ralph telling of his run up and back and what he had seen in the city.

At last, as it was growing late, he arose to go on board the Sea Pearl, which lay half a mile distant from the captain's cabin.

"Better stay to-night, Ralph," said the captain.

"Yes, Ralph, do stay," urged Mrs. Kenton. "I wish you would, Ralph, for it is a long walk to the schooner," Pearl said.

"Thank you all, but I guess I will go, for it is a beautiful moonlight night and I will enjoy the walk.

"Good-night!"

And away he went in the moonlight, while the captain went on reading his papers, Pearl retired to her cozy little room and her mother continued her sewing.

"Ralph is going to make a splendid man, Karl," said Mrs. Kenton after a while.

"He is indeed; but I wish he would tell us the rest of his life."

"You always said he had a secret."

"Yes, he is haunted by one, for I have watched him closely, and as you know, wife, I have now reason to know too well what it is to have one.

"Ah me! I hope the poor boy's life will not always be shortened by a cloud, as mine has been."

"He never speaks of his life at the place he called his home."

"Not even to Pearl?"

"If so, she has never referred to it even to me— Ah! what is the matter, Karl?"

The eyes of the captain had meanwhile been running over a paper he had just opened, and his wife saw his face change as he suddenly came upon something that startled him.

He did not answer at once, but read on for a minute and then said:

"Let me read you something, wife, and be prepared for a startling discovery."

The man spoke in a low, suppressed tone, and Mrs. Kenton asked quickly:

"About ourselves, Karl?"

"Oh no, not about you and I, but of one we know too well.

"Listen to this," and Captain Karl Kenton read aloud as follows:

"A SMUGGLER CAPTURED!"

"A MYSTERIOUS CRAFT THAT HAS BEEN DOING LAWLESS WORK ON THE COAST, RUN DOWN AND CAPTURED!"

"A BOLD CAPTURE!"

"The Revenue Cutter Rush has had its eye for some time upon a craft that has been suspected of lawless work in our waters of late, and two days ago managed to catch the rascals while engaged in smuggling.

"It seems that some months ago a New Yorker came here in a handsome yacht, which he sold in port, on account of being ill, and returned home overland.

"The purchaser of the pretty craft was a young coaster, a dweller it is said in the community known as the Wreckers of Point Desolation, and who, though suspected of certain lawless acts have never been caught breaking the law.

"But this young Wrecker secured a crew and turned his craft into a smuggler, doing a thriving business in defrauding the revenue.

"But the captain of the Rush at last got on his track, learned that he was to meet a vessel up the

coast some leagues at a certain point, and receive from her a valuable cargo.

"Rush sailed for the rendezvous, surprised the smugglers in their work, captured the vessel bringing the booty and gave chase to the yacht.

"Seeing that he was to be captured the bold smuggler ran his craft ashore, tried to beat off the boats from the Rush, firing boldly upon them, and killing a seaman and wounding others.

"As he could not check their advance, he set fire to the craft and escaped with his crew in the yacht's two boats, though not without loss as several of his men were known to have been slain.

"The smugglers made good their escape to the hills, and it is not to be expected that they will be captured as there was no one to aid the crew of the Rush, who followed them some distance.

"The Revenue Cutter was therefore compelled to give up the chase, content with the destruction of the yacht and the punishment inflicted upon the smugglers, at the same time bringing in as a prize the craft that had brought the booty to the outlaw vessel.

"The name of the smuggler craft it is said was Defiance, and her captain was known as Marlo.

"He is a bold and dangerous fellow to be at large, and we sincerely hope that he will be captured."

CHAPTER XVIII.

BRANDED.

WHEN Captain Karl had finished reading the startling story of the smuggler craft and her captain, he dropped the paper and regarding his wife in silence awaited for her to speak.

Mrs. Kenton seemed like one dazed, and as she uttered no word of comment her husband at last asked:

"Well, wife, what do you think of that?"

"Can it be true?"

"There can be no doubt of it."

"But, would Marlo be so evil as that?"

"It says that the vessel was a yacht, purchased from a New York gentleman."

"Yes."

"So was Marlo's vessel."

"True."

"The paper says that she was manned by one, Marlo."

"Yes."

"And a crew from the Wreckers of Point Desolation."

"I heard the slander upon our people, Karl."

"Now, as the name of the yacht was given as the Defiance, and the name Marlo also known, there can be no doubt."

"Yes, Marlo's craft he called the Defiance."

"And got a large crew for her."

"He did."

"He was away from here most of the time."

"He was."

"He gave no account of himself."

"None."

"The crew he had was formed of the wildest spirits of the settlement."

"Yes."

"He always had plenty of money."

"Very true."

"There is no doubt in my mind that it is Marlo."

"Nor in mine."

They were silent for some minutes and then Mrs. Kenton said:

"Read the account again, Karl."

Captain Karl did so, and then said:

"You remember, wife, Marlo returned in a whale-boat with his men and said his vessel had been lost, and with her several of his men?"

"I remember, Karl."

"He said, too, that he was done with the sea and intended so go to the ranches."

"Yes, and was anxious to get away."

"He took with him all of his crew, and so removed himself and the others from this settlement, as though suspecting that he was known, along with the fact that he made his home at Point Desolation and so wanted to be out of the way with his men should the Rush or some naval vessel come here."

"I feel there can be no doubt of his guilt, Karl; but will a vessel-of-war come here, think you?"

"I very much fear there will be a vessel arrive here soon to inspect and investigate, for as the smugglers killed a sailor of the Rush and wounded others they will be hunted down if it is possible to find them."

"And what will you do, Karl?"

The man started at the question and did not answer until it was repeated:

"What will you do, Karl?"

"I will state plainly to the officer that one of our young men has been on the downward course of late, and has led some of the others astray."

"I will say that I fear that he is the one from what we know of his actions, and that he has gone up into the mountains with his men."

"If he presses me for more information, I can only direct him to where he will find him."

"When we came here, wife, there were lawless men in the band; but we checked that and I feel that not an act of wrong has been done by our people until Marlo has been guilty of this heinous crime."

"As a peaceful people we cannot allow this shadow to rest upon us, and we must clear ourselves by seeing that we aid in the punishment of the guilty."

"But it will cause trouble, for some of Marlo's crew are of our best people."

"I am sorry but I care not where the ax shall fall, for I shall do my duty as my conscience dictates."

Mrs. Kenton knew her husband and was well aware that he would do as he said, that he would shield no law-breaker in the community over which he held full sway as chief.

"It will be a great blow to Pearl," she said.

"True, and to all of us; but Marlo has laid his course wrong and if he finds breakers ahead he has only himself to blame for being wrecked through false steering."

"What will Ralph think, I wonder?" said Mrs. Kenton thoughtfully.

"I do not know."

"Do you think he suspects what Marlo has been?"

"If so, he has never betrayed him by a word or hint."

"Yet he knows how Marlo hates him."

"That would make no difference to Ralph; but he had these papers and may have seen the account I read you."

"But you do not think he would make it known to you?"

"No, for fear I might think he was making a charge against a man he knew to be his bitterest foe."

"Ralph will not do an underhand act, but fight his enemy openly and face to face."

"What would be done with Marlo if he was captured, Karl?"

"He would be hanged beyond all doubt, for he killed a seaman, firing upon United States officers in the discharge of their duty."

"He must have known this, so was anxious to escape to the ranches."

"Yes, and now that I know what he is I will have Ralph keep a guard at night upon our little fleet, for he might wish to escape by water and come down from the mountains and cut out one of our vessels."

"It would be well to have them guarded, Karl."

"Yes, I will talk with Ralph about it in the morning," was the answer, and soon after the captain and his wife retired, but the discovery they had made kept them awake for a long while.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DEMAND.

THE moon shone brightly, when Ralph the Runaway left his home, as he called Captain Karl's cabin.

There was a room there for him whenever he chose to occupy it, but he had made his

quarters on board the Sea Pearl and preferred to remain there.

He had fitted up the commodious cabin in a most comfortable manner, and seemed happy in his sea home, but was always glad to take his meals at the Kenton home and do all he could to help Mrs. Kenton in her household duties.

Now as he strode along he saw that nearly every light in the settlement had been extinguished, and this told him that it was later than his usual hour for leaving.

But the settlers were a quiet people and seldom did they sit up after nine o'clock, unless it was the Kentons, who were wont to retire about ten o'clock.

Along the ridge went Ralph, then down the path toward the sandy shore of the haven.

He saw the distant sea, the white line that marked the reef upon which the barque Rainbow had been wrecked, heard the roar of the surf beating upon the rocks, then glanced up the inlet whose waters were as placid as a millpond.

There beneath him was the land-locked harbor in which the fleet of the coasters rode at anchor.

Upon the sandy shore, drawn up beyond the reach of the tide, were half a hundred boats and skiffs.

It was a pretty moonlit picture and for some time the youth stood enjoying it.

Though still hardly more than a boy in years he felt that he was a man in experience, and he would not have shrunk from any call upon him that a man could do.

Somehow as he stood there in the moonlight his thoughts reverted to the past, nearly four years, when he had become a runaway, a fugitive, as he had then believed from the gallows, bearing upon his conscience the lives of two men.

He could not but feel that the cloud still followed him, that he was still a fugitive from justice.

At last with a sigh, we went on down the path to the sandy shore.

There were no others who slept on board their vessels, unless it was a crew who intended to run out early in the morning, so Ralph felt that he was all alone.

But he had no dread, was not superstitious, and so only a feeling of lonesomeness came over him as he shoved his light skiff into the water, seized the oars and rowed out to the Sea Pearl.

The schooner lay at anchor a cable's length off-shore, and apart to herself, just where she had let fall her anchors when running in that afternoon.

The crew had gone to their homes, so Ralph expected to see no one on board, and was somewhat startled when, as his skiff ran alongside, he heard the words:

"So you have come at last?"

He sprang on deck, holding the painter of his skiff in his hand, and glancing up at the speaker, saw that Marlo stood before him:

"Ah, Marlo, it is you, is it?"

"Yes."

"This is an honor I had not looked for, a visit from you; but what can I do for you?"

"I have come to have a talk with you, Ralph Rollo."

"It is late, and you had better turn in for the night, for I can offer you a good berth, and talk it over in the morning."

"No, what I have to say must be said to-night."

"All right, but may I ask when you came on board my vessel?"

"Your vessel?"

"Well, to be explicit to please you, the craft I command?"

"Just after dark."

"And how did you get here?"

"I was rowed aboard by a friend, who waits me at the Point yonder."

"Ah! then your business with me must be of an important nature."

"It is."

"I am ready to hear it."

"Perhaps you will not be so ready when you know why I have come."

"I can only judge by knowing."

"Well, I have come to tell you, Ralph Rollo, that you are in my way."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, or I am in yours."

"Not in the least, for I do not care for you, Marlo, I admit, and care to have nothing to do with you one way or another."

"Well, I admit that you are in my way."

"In what respect?"

"I stood next to Captain Karl in the eyes of all, until you came."

"What have I to do with that?"

"You came and treacherously displaced me."

"See here, Marlo, I am no traitor to a friend, and I fight a foe openly."

"I came here a stranger, and because I hoped to find a home here I remained."

"From the first you hated me, for I saw it in your every look, noted it in your words."

"Now you have tried to humiliate me by defeat scores of times, and because I was your superior hated me the more."

"Do not let us quarrel, so go your way and let me go mine."

"You turned the girl I loved against me."

"Do you mean Pearl, a mere child?"

"She is a woman, not a child."

"Not yet fifteen."

"Well, I love her, and I know that you seek to win her and I have come here to-night to demand that you meet me, that you fight a duel with me, with pistols, rifles or swords, for you have your choice; but fight me you shall, and over on the point one of my friends and one of yours await us, for I sent for one whom I felt you would trust."

"Come, you must fight, or I will post you as a coward before the whole settlement."

"Now will you meet me?"

"Certainly, as you demand it," was the cool reply.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DUEL.

A GLEAM of joy shot over the face of Marlo at the response of the Runaway, and which the latter did not fail to note.

It told him how determined the young sailor was to force him to meet him in a duel.

"What weapons do you prefer, Marlo?" asked Ralph quietly.

He had learned to fence as a boy, and afterward, aboard ship, had practiced much with swords, and again with Captain Karl who was very fond of the exercise.

He had also kept himself in practice with rifle and revolver, and it was a matter of perfect indifference to him which weapon Marlo chose to meet him with.

"It is for you to say," said Marlo.

"You are the challenged party."

"You are very kind, but I do not care, so I leave the choice to you."

"As I am such a fine swordsman perhaps it would be more manly in me to say revolvers."

"As you please; they are more deadly, though with swords perhaps we could come to an understanding when one or the other was disarmed."

"There is to be no 'understanding,' for this fight is to be to the death."

"So be it, Marlo."

"Where are your friends?"

"I have a friend, as I said, over on the Point, and one of your friends is there too."

"Who is my friend?"

"Berkley."

"Ah! I do not even have the selection of my second in this meeting with you."

"Berkley is your friend, not mine, and that is why I sent for him."

"I see; but I guess he will do. Who is your second?"

"Sawyer."

"Your mate of the Defiance?"

"Yes."

"A man of a very unsavory record; but he will do, so let us go ashore and settle this affair."

The coolness of the Runaway disconcerted Marlo, in a measure, and he watched him

while he went into the cabin and got his revolver.

Then the two entered their respective skiffs and rowed ashore.

The point was at the upper end of the inlet, a sandy spit jutting out from the shore and hiding the mouth of the creek.

The two skiffs landed, and there came to greet the occupants two young men.

"We thought you were never coming, Marlo," said one.

"Ralph stayed late and just returned; but here we are at last."

"Ralph, I was sent for by Marlo to come here and do you a favor, and I learned that it was to serve you in a duel, so I am at your service," said one of the two young men.

"You are very kind, Berkley, and now that you are here I will ask you to serve me in this affair, which, let me say, is not of my seeking."

"I have nothing to do with the quarrel, Captain Rollo, but I am here to see that you get fair play."

"Thank you, and as I wish the affair over, please arrange matters as speedily as possible."

"If I fall, you will report my death to Captain Karl, who will take charge of my effects."

"I will do as you wish."

"Now I will see Sawyer and arrange."

So saying Berkley walked apart with Sawyer, who was known in the settlement as "Marlo's Shadow," for he was always with him, and had a record about on a par with his friend's.

After a short talk together the two seconds announced the pistols loaded, and coming forward they placed their principals in position ten paces apart.

They had gone back to where a ridge of rocks cut off the sound from the settlement, and where the moonlight fell brightly upon the scene.

It fell to Berkley to give the word, and Ralph noticed, even at that moment as he stood upon the threshold of the grave, that his second's voice had a tremor in it as though he was deeply moved.

Sawyer stood apart, watching Ralph rather than his own principal, and these things the Runaway could not but take note of.

As for Marlo he was as cool as an icicle, and his face showed the intense hatred he felt for his young rival—as he would persist in regarding Rollo.

Berkley, after some hesitation, gave the word, his voice toward the last becoming almost inaudible and more tremulous.

"Are you ready?"

Both of the young sailors simply uttered the one word together:

"Yes."

"Fire!"

The two revolvers flashed almost simultaneously.

Then a second after the form of Ralph the Runaway swayed and fell heavily to the ground, where it lay motionless, his revolver at the same time dropping from his nerveless hand.

"You have killed him, Marlo."

"I intended to, Berkley."

"He is shot over the right temple."

"That is where I aimed."

"Now put him in the skiff, you and Sawyer, and leave him on board his schooner."

"If you wish the matter kept a secret, so be it for your sake, for no one need know that I came down from the mountains."

"All right then, the secret rests with ourselves," answered Berkley.

"Yes, now hasten to the schooner with the body, for some one may have heard the shots and investigate," said Marlo in a tone of anxiety.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE DISCOVERY.

THE form of Ralph the Runaway was raised in the arms of Sawyer and Berkley, while Marlo gazed at them in a strange sort of way, and was placed in his own skiff.

Then he was rowed out to the schooner and laid upon the deck, just as though he had tripped over a rope and fallen, thus shooting himself by accident, for his revolver was placed in one hand.

Rapidly the two men then rowed shoreward, and while Berkley hastened away to his home, Marlo and Sawyer mounted their horses, hitched in a thicket near by, and rode away at full speed for the mountains.

"Remember, it is to be a secret between us,

Marlo, for you have had your revenge," warned Berkley as he bade the others good-by.

"Yes, a secret that we three must keep," was the answer; and thus they parted.

Berkley reached his cabin home, where he dwelt with his mother, and threw himself down upon his cot to sleep, though in vain, for slumber would not come to his eyes.

He started as he heard a rapid step without, and springing to the window saw the tall form of Captain Karl going by.

"Where is he going?" he muttered, for the captain's way led toward the harborage.

And Captain Karl was very much like Berkley that night, for he, too, could not sleep.

After reading what he had about Marlo he had in vain sought slumber.

At last he determined to get up and go down to the schooner, placing the facts before Ralph. After that he would feel better.

"It may be that Marlo may attempt some underhand work, for he will know that we must learn the truth, and he must be thwarted, for I have an idea he may cut my schooner out and escape southward in her, or use her in the same lawless work again."

"Yes, I will go down and talk with Ralph, for his level head may help me."

So throwing on his cloak, for a chilly breeze came off the ocean, Captain Kenton wended his way down toward the shore.

His steps led him by the home of Berkley, and little did he dream what a story that young sailor could tell did he wish to.

Reaching the sandy beach he shoved a skiff into the water and paddled out to the schooner.

"Ha! what does this mean?" he cried as he beheld the form of the Runaway lying upon the deck.

Springing aboard he saw the wound over the temple, the blood-stained deck, and then he cried.

"By Heaven, there has been foul work here! But, oh! thank Heaven he is not dead!"

At once he took the form in his strong arms, placed it in the skiff and rowed rapidly ashore.

Raising the senseless Ralph upon his shoulders, for the captain was a man of great strength, he set off at a quick pace for his own cabin, again passing the house of Berkley, who, hearing his steps, arose and sprung to the window and beheld the ghastly load he carried, ghastly at least to him.

"My God! what a fool I have been!" groaned the betrayer as he returned to his bed once more, though with sleep further from his eyes than ever.

In the mean while Captain Karl re-entered his house, called up his wife, and Ralph was placed in the room known as his own.

"How fortunate, Karl, that you are a physician," said Mrs. Kenton, as her husband set to work examining the wound just as Pearl, who had been awakened, appeared in the doorway.

"Oh, mamma, what has happened?" she asked, in some alarm.

"Some one has wounded Ralph, my child, but we hope not seriously. Dress yourself quickly, for you can aid us," calmly answered the mother.

Then she turned to Captain Karl, who had been examining the wound slowly, and said:

"Don't say that it is fatal, Karl."

"No, it is a gunshot wound, fired from the front. It cut to the bone, but has not penetrated the skull. The shock only has rendered him unconscious."

"Are you sure the skull is not fractured?"

"So I think. If we can restore him I shall feel no doubt of the result."

They at once set to work to restore the young sailor to consciousness, and after a long while were successful.

But the shock had been a severe one, seeming to deaden the motor nerves and senses utterly.

At last, however, the chest heaved convulsively, and after a long while, the skill and patience of Captain Karl were rewarded by seeing the large, splendid eyes slowly open.

There was a dimness about them at first—a dazed, far-away look; but at last, when a stimulant had been administered, a gleam of recognition came into them, and the sufferer spoke.

"I thought I was dead; but I know you now, captain, and you, my good mother: yes, and you, Pearl."

"I am at home, am I not?"

"Yes, indeed, Ralph; but you must keep very quiet, for you have been wounded, and—"

"Yes, I recall now all about the duel."

"What duel?"

"The one I fought. Did I kill him?"

"Kill who?"

"Marlo!" was the response of the Runaway, and as he heard the name, a suppressed execration broke from between the shut teeth of Captain Karl.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CHARGE.

AS Ralph rallied very quickly, Captain Karl decided that it was best to let him talk and relieve his mind thus of the story he knew he had to tell.

"There has been foul play against you, Ralph, I feel assured, so tell us about it all, but do not get excited."

"You will feel the better for it, and can then get rest, leaving me to act in the matter."

"I hardly think there was foul play, Captain Karl, other than that I was forced to fight a duel with Marlo; and yet, as I saw that he was determined to kill me, and I aimed to kill him, it must be, if I did not harm him, that something was wrong."

"Something was wrong, I am sure, Ralph, and we will know it all in good time."

"Now answer my questions, please."

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you meet Marlo?"

"He was upon my vessel, awaiting my return."

"Alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"You fought, there?"

"No, sir; he determined that I should meet him, said I had destroyed his good name in the settlement, and had acted as a traitor toward him."

"Then he said that his friend, Sawyer, and a friend of mine, Berkley, whom he had sent for, awaited us on Sandy Point, and I could select my weapons."

"Revolvers were chosen."

"Who loaded them?"

"Berkley and Sawyer."

"Did you see them loaded?"

"No, sir."

"Are you particularly friendly with Berkley?"

"No, sir, I really do not like him."

"Yet permitted him to act for you in a matter where your life was at stake?"

"It was a position I could not help, sir."

"Well?"

"We stood at ten paces, and as Berkley gave the word, we fired, and I saw that Marlo intended to kill me."

"How did you stand?"

"I stood with my back to the rocks, Marlo toward the water."

"You fell and knew nothing of the result?"

"Nothing, sir."

"All right, Ralph. You can now seek rest, and to-morrow we will investigate this affair."

"You are all right, for your brain is as clear as crystal and you will soon be well again."

"Drink this now, and go to sleep, for it is nearly dawn."

The draught was a soothing one, and Ralph soon sunk to sleep, when Captain Karl, telling his wife and daughter to retire and get what sleep they could, went out and took the path for Berkley's cabin.

He knew the room the young man slept in, and gently tapped upon the window.

The face of Berkley peered into his own and it was livid in the moonlight.

"Come, Berkley, there has been a foul deed done this night in our midst and I wish your aid in finding out all about it."

"Don't disturb your mother, but come with me."

Berkley breathed more freely, for he felt that Captain Karl had only come to him as his nearest neighbor.

That the Runaway was not dead never entered his mind.

He soon appeared before the captain, and asked:

"What has happened?"

"I went down to see Ralph about an important matter, and found him lying shot upon his deck."

"My God!"

"I could not believe that he had shot himself, though his position with a revolver in his hand pointed in that direction."

"Then it must be that he did."

"I took his body to my home and worked over him for a long while, and then I came to see you and ask your aid in solving this mystery before I aroused the settlement."

"I will do all I can, sir, to help you."

"Now, what is your theory, or would you rather first view the body?"

The young man started, his face becoming

more livid and in a voice quivering with dread he cried excitedly:

"No! no! I do not wish to see the body!"
 "It really would do no good; but, what is your opinion about it Berkley?"
 "I really do not know, sir, what to say."
 "Shall I tell you?"
 "Well, yes, sir."
 "I will."

"Do you regard Marlo as your particular friend?"

"I always liked Marlo, sir."
 "And how about Ralph?"
 "Well, sir, we were the best of friends, and his death pains me deeply."
 "Who said he was dead?"
 "Why, you did, sir."
 "I did nothing of the kind."

"Why, captain, I—"
 "I said I found him lying shot upon his deck and carried his body home, where I worked on it for a long while."

"Is he not dead, sir?" gasped Berkley.

"No."
 "Is he conscious, sir?"
 "Not now."

The man gave a sigh of relief.
 "Now, Berkley, he is not conscious for he is asleep, under the influence of a powder I gave him."

"Will you make a confession now?"

"A confession, sir?"

"Yes."

"I do not—"

"Hold! do not lie, for I know it all!"

"Tell me the truth or it will be the worse for you. I am no man to trifle with, as you well know," and Captain Karl laid his hand heavily upon the shoulder of the traitor, while he added:

"Berkley, I charge you with being an accomplice in the attempt to kill Ralph Rollo. Now, what have you to say?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

SELF-ACCUSED.

BERKLEY felt that he had trapped himself, and was at the mercy of Captain Karl.

So he cried earnestly:

"Oh, captain! for the sake of my poor old mother spare me!"

"What have you to tell me, sir!" was the stern question.

"Anything, everything, sir, if you will only spare me."

"I make no promises, for you should have thought of your poor old mother before you were led into guilt by Marlo."

"I should, sir, I should!"

"What story have you to tell? Remember, Ralph will not die, and that I know the truth."

"Well, sir, I am glad to know that he will not die, for in a way I was guilty."

"How?"

"Well, Captain Karl, Marlo came to my house and called me out."

"He said Ralph had returned from San Francisco and intended to try and ruin him by false stories regarding him, and he should force him to fight a duel with him."

"He said that I must be Ralph's second, and he took me with him to Sandy Point."

"There I found Sawyer with two horses, for he and Marlo had just come down from the mountains."

"Marlo told me to wait with Sawyer while he went to the schooner and challenged Ralph."

"We waited until nearly midnight when they came ashore in separate skiffs, and the duel was arranged, I acting for Ralph."

"Who loaded the pistols?"

"Sawyer."

"You saw him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was Marlo hurt?"

"No, sir."

"Was Marlo cool?"

"Perfectly."

"And Ralph?"

"Was as indifferent as one could be."

"They fired together?"

"Yes, sir."

"And Marlo hit Ralph in the head?"

"Yes."

"And Ralph missed?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why?"

"I do not know, sir."

"Remember, I want the truth."

"You will promise to spare me?"

"No, I make no promises, Berkley, for some one must suffer in this affair."

Berkley was silent, and Captain Kenton added:

"You saw the revolver loaded?"

"Yes, sir."

"And Sawyer loaded both of them?"

"He did."

"Why did you not load the weapon of the man you professed to serve?"

"Sawyer said he would do it."

"How did the two men stand?"

"Ralph had his back to the rocks."

"He was dressed in black?"

"Yes, sir."

"The rocks are like chalk?"

"Yes, sir."

"His body a strong relief against them."

"Again the man was silent."

"Who placed the men in position?"

"Sawyer."

"And how was Marlo dressed?"

"In buckskin, sir?"

"And there was a sand-dune behind him?"

"Yes."

"So that he could hardly be seen?"

"Well, sir, I guess it was so."

"Now did you see Sawyer put a bullet in both revolvers?"

"I did not, sir, and that is my sin, for I did not see whether he loaded either of them with ball."

"That is all I wish to know, Berkley."

"Now, let me tell you that you must go with me to the Pen, and be locked up, for though I will, for your mother's sake, do all I can to save you from the punishment you richly deserve, I will yet say that you shall not escape altogether, for I believe you were paid to act as the tool of Marlo in this affair, and connived to allow the death of the youth you were supposed to be friend."

"Oh, Captain Karl, it will kill my poor mother."

"My wife will go to her this morning and tell the truth as gently as she can."

"Come, you must go with me."

The captain saw it was the intention of Berkley to bound away from him, and quick as a flash he had him by the throat, hurled him to the ground and slipped a pair of handcuffs upon him.

"You will come now," he said quietly.

In silence the sailor went along to the lock-up, a strong cabin known as the Pen, and which to the credit of the settlement he it said, was seldom occupied.

The key hung near and unlocking the iron-grated door Captain Karl thrust his prisoner into the Pen and locked him within.

It was dawn now, and fire-lights were glimmering in several cabins, so that Captain Karl knew that the people were rising to begin the duties of the day.

Hanging over the Pen was a ship's bell, and seizing the rope the captain gave it a number of sharp pulls, sending forth upon the crisp morning air a loud alarm.

It was the warning given when the settlers were to assemble, and near the Pen was a large cabin known as the "Court," where assemblies were held.

At the first notes of the tocsin sounding the alarm, doors flew open and men began to hurry toward the rendezvous.

There stood their chief with folded arms, his face calm as the waters of the inlet, though an angry light gleamed in his eyes. When the men had assembled and stood in silence regarding their captain, and the form crouching in the lock-up, he said in his deep, stern tones:

"My people, I have a story to tell you of a crime committed last night in our midst."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE STORY TOLD.

THE men knew well that something had happened under cover of the night, to move their chief to utter the words he had, and they awaited in silence what he would have to say.

"In the first place, my people, I wish to read to you something I found in a San Francisco paper last night, and which reflects against us all in that it accuses one of us of a heinous crime, and which may bring trouble upon our homes."

"When you have heard all, then it will be for you to decide what is to be done with the one who has thus cast shame upon us."

Then the chief read the article in the paper regarding the loss of the Defiance, escape of Marlo, and what he had been accused of.

There was an angry look upon every face, for few doubted the truth of what they heard, and those few were the immediate friends of the accused man.

When he had finished the article, Captain Karl looked over the crowd.

All were there then—men, women, and chil-

dren—all in the settlement with the exception of the chief's own family and several who were invalids or too aged to come at the call of the tocsin.

When he saw that the people awaited to hear more, Captain Karl resumed:

"After reading these charges against one of our people, aided by his crew, I felt sad at heart, and could not sleep."

"At last I arose to go to my vessel and talk it all over with my adopted son, Ralph Rollo."

"I went, and I found him lying upon his deck, a pistol-wound in his head."

An angry murmur ran through the crowd at this, and men began to show great excitement.

"I feared he was dead; but I bore his body to my home, and after a long while restored him to consciousness, and discovered that the bullet had not seriously hurt him, yet stunned him completely."

"He told his story, and then I entrapped one who had been, with others, the cause of his being shot."

"To that man's home I went, and forced from him his story."

"He is crouching in the Pen there, hiding his face from your gaze."

"He at first lied to me, and then told the truth, of how he had been made to second Ralph Rollo in a duel, and to allow the second of his foe to load the weapons, so that no bullet should be put in the weapon of their intended victim."

"Now, the one who came by night and forced this duel upon Ralph Rollo, was Marlo, and his second was his first mate, Sawyer."

Again a murmur ran over the crowd, ominous to Marlo.

"The one who acted as second to Ralph Rollo," resumed Captain Karl, "and who is in the Pen there, is none other than the friend of the adversary of the one he pretended to serve—Berkley!"

A rush was made for the grated door, for not one had been able to distinguish who the crouching form was, and many believed it to be Marlo himself.

"Now, my people, Berkley is safe, for I have the key, and no harm must be done him."

"But I wish a score of men to mount and ride with me to the mountains, and take prisoner Marlo and his men, for unless we show that we are not allies in crime with them, the Government will send a vessel-of-war here to bring destruction and suffering upon all of us."

"Will you aid me, my people, in putting our heels upon this lawlessness at once, in the very start, and rooting out from our midst those who would bring shame and suffering upon us?"

A perfect roar answered the question, and Captain Karl having appointed two men to stand guard over the prisoner, dispersed the crowd with orders to those who were to accompany him to meet at his cabin an hour later, armed and prepared for the march to the mountains.

Then he went to the home of the mother of the unfortunate prisoner and found that his good wife had broken the news to her as kindly as possible.

"Your boy shall not be severely punished, Mrs. Berkley, so do not feel cast down, but he must not go wholly unpunished, for his treachery toward Ralph deserves it," he said.

"Oh, good chief, if it will only be a lesson to him to keep away from Marlo, who has always had an evil influence over him," sighed the poor woman.

"He will let Marlo alone in future, you may be assured," was the significant answer of the chief, who then sought his own home.

Ralph was awake, and though feeling heavy and with a severe headache, was in no danger, and wished to join the family at breakfast, but this was not allowed, and Pearl said that she would see that he was well cared for and had to mind her.

The men began to assemble as Captain Karl finished breakfast, and then the party started on foot to the pasture where the horses were kept.

There, in a cabin, their saddles and bridles were kept, and mounting they rode off for the mountains where they hoped to find Marlo and his men and capture them without bloodshed, though they went prepared to fight the smuggler band if necessary.

CHAPTER XXV.

ON THE WAR-TRAIL.

THE party of sailor-horsemen rode along at a steady pace, led by their chief.

They all saw the truth of what Captain Karl had said, that if they shielded Marlo and his

When as smugglers, they would simply bring vengeance upon themselves.

They could understand, with the facts before them, the many absences of Marlo in his vessel, and why he and his crew had been possessed of so much money, for it had been gained by smuggling when on his cruises.

That he had allowed his hatred of Ralph to carry him so far as to have to vent it by taking the life of his rival they knew revealed his wicked nature.

So as they rode along they meditated upon the intention of Captain Karl to capture Marlo and his men, and as to what would be done with them.

It was a ride of twenty odd miles up to the ranches, and that he might see just how matters stood, Captain Karl rode on ahead of his men, determined to reach the cabins at dinner time when all were there.

He told his men to advance by way of a canyon near the cabins, seize the horses and be ready to answer his call when he needed them.

By this canyon they could approach within a couple of hundred yards of the cabins of the sailor cowboys, while his advancing by the direct trail would draw their attention in that direction.

So he parted with his men several miles from the cabins and went his way alone.

He reached the plateau under the cliffs, where the cabins were, and saw before the doors several horses saddled and bridled.

He rode on, and as he drew near, a man came out of the cabin followed by two others who greeted the chief pleasantly.

But not one of those three men were members of Marlo's crew, being the regular mountaineers who lived at the ranches owned by the coasters in common.

"Ho, Melton, how are you?" called out the chief in his pleasant way and he shook hands with the man and his two comrades as he came up.

"All right, captain. All well with you I hope?"

"Well, no, and that is what brought me up here.

"Where is Marlo?"

"His cattle stampeded to the mountains, captain, and he has gone after them."

"When was this?"

"Some three hours ago, sir."

"Where are his men?"

"Gone with him, sir."

"All of them?"

"Every one of his crew, sir."

"How came the cattle to stampede, Melton?"

"I don't know, sir; but Marlo came to the cabins, told me they had bolted and went with his men in chase of them."

"Has any one been up from the settlement to-day, Melton?"

"Well, I didn't see any one, sir, but I heard that Vezey was here, and acted as though he did not wish to be seen."

"Ah yes, Vezey is one of Marlo's men?"

"Yes, sir, and was laid up at home, I heard; but he came here this morning."

"At what time?"

"Just before Marlo started after the cattle, sir."

"Where is Vezey?"

"He went with Marlo, my boys said."

"Was Marlo away last night?"

"I saw him going on the coast trail, sir, with Sawyer."

"When?"

"Last evening, sir."

"When did he return?"

"He was in camp at breakfast, sir, but looked as though he had made a night of it, as Sawyer did too."

"You do not like Marlo, Melton?"

"Frankly, captain, I do not, for we were getting along all right here, when Marlo came up with his men and said he was to herd the cattle and be the chief."

"I could say nothing against it, and so divided my cattle, meaning yours, sir, from the herd, and looked after them."

"Then Marlo and his men did not half do their duty, as they were in camp most of the time gambling."

"No, sir, I do not like Marlo or his men."

"I don't think you will be worried with them again, Melton, as you will understand when I tell you my story."

"I have not come here alone as you will see," and placing a small silver whistle to his lips Captain Karl gave three sharp blasts.

Instantly from out a thicket fringing a canyon, came his men at a gallop, to the great surprise of Melton and those with him.

As they drew rein Captain Karl called out:

"Lads, the birds have flown, for Vezey came here and gave the alarm."

"It was the tracks of his horse we saw coming at such a rapid pace."

"Where have they gone, captain?" asked one.

"To the mountains."

"We can pursue them."

"Yes, and I may be able to overtake them."

"Melton, you know this country perfectly, I believe."

"Yes, sir."

"Then mount, as soon as we have gotten fresh horses, and lead us upon the trail of Marlo and his men, for news has come that they have turned smugglers, fired on a United States boat sent to capture them, and last night Marlo and Sawyer came down to the settlement for the express purpose of putting an end to Ralph Rollo."

"You know now why we have come, so lead us in pursuit, for those men must be taken dead or alive!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PURSUIT.

MELTON waited to hear no more, but led the party to the pasture where they could get a fresh mount from the many horses there, and in half an hour was leading the coasters upon the trail of the fugitives.

That Marlo had been given the alarm by Vezey, and had hastily taken flight there was no doubt, for a hasty examination of the cabins occupied by the men showed that they had carried their traps with them, and all had been left in confusion.

Had they been going after stampeded cattle they would not have taken anything with them.

Had further proof been wanting it was found in discovering that the cattle herded by Marlo and his men appeared to have been driven toward the mountains, and after going a short distance had been left alone, while the trail of the sailor cowboys led on into the recesses of the range.

Melton was a good trailer and he led the captain and his followers on at a rapid pace.

All now knew that to catch up with the fugitives meant a battle, for Marlo must know the truth now and he was not the one to surrender quietly.

He knew that the settlers aroused against him by his acts would show him no mercy, and to save his life and the lives of his men he must fight for them.

Melton pushed rapidly on and it seemed that they were gaining on the fugitives, from the freshness of the tracks.

At last, however, night came on and they were forced to go into camp.

The moon soon rose, but in that wild country its rays were not bright enough to enable the trailers to see the trail.

So with deep regret all felt that they must camp until the next morning.

With the first glimmer of dawn they were again upon the trail, and all halted suddenly as they saw that it abruptly turned into a canyon leading back to the ranches.

"What does this mean, Melton?" asked Captain Karl, and there was anxiety in his look and voice as though he knew but too well what it meant.

"It can mean but one thing, captain."

"And what is that?"

"That they have doubled on us and gone back."

"Where?"

"To the ranches."

"Will we find them there?"

"I think not, sir."

"Where then?"

"Well, captain, Marlo is a sailor at heart, and knowing that he is a fugitive now, I believe he will strike for the coast."

"Yes."

"And cut out one of the fleet and put to sea, seeking a landing beyond all pursuit."

"My very idea, Melton."

"But we may yet be in time, so come, lead us back at a run."

Melton did so, not for a moment sparing the horses they rode.

Arriving at the ranches they discovered that Marlo and his men had changed their horses for fresh ones and had then pushed on for the coast.

"We must take our horses again, the ones we came on, and push ahead with all speed."

"You, Melton, I leave in full charge as before, and I only regret I allowed Marlo and his men to come here," said the chief.

So the horses were exchanged, and the party set off at a gallop back to the coast.

There was no difficulty in one following the trail, so broad was it, and the horses were not spared in the least on the way back.

Captain Kenton could understand that in returning to the settlement Marlo had but one motive in view, and that was to seize a vessel and escape to sea.

He knew that the cowboy smugglers had arrived at night, when the settlement was in repose, and expecting no harm, no watch had been set over the fleet.

Of course it would be an easy matter for the cowboy smugglers to go on his vessel, the Sea Pearl, the best, largest and fleetest of the squadron, and put to sea in her.

The captain looked at the trees and saw that they were waving from a brisk wind, and this he was sorry to see, as it told him the smugglers had a chance to make good their escape.

"If they have cut out the Sea Pearl, Massey," he said to the man riding by his side, "we must take the next best craft to go in pursuit."

"Yes, captain, and that one is my own schooner, the Idle Wings."

"True, she is the fleetest if the Sea Pearl has gone, and Marlo's craft is not with the fleet, and she is a good sea boat as well and large enough to easily carry thirty men."

"Yes, captain, without too much crowding."

"We will mount on her the two six-pounders we got from the reef when the barque Rainbow was wrecked, and that will give us a great advantage, added to having some ten men more than Marlo."

"Yes, captain, and I hope we can catch him; but your schooner is a fast one and a stern chase is a long one."

"Very correct, and I only wish some vessel-of-war was off the coast to give chase; but here we are in sight of home, and we will soon know whether Marlo has escaped, or not," and with horses in a foam and panting from their long, hard ride, the mounted sailors dashed into the settlement.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE ESCAPE.

A GLANCE at the excited people in the settlement was sufficient to show Captain Kenton and those with him, that something unusual had occurred.

As they appeared they were greeted with loud cheers, and all those near them tried to talk at the same time.

But Captain Karl sprung from his horse and turned to his wife.

"Well, wife, our journey was a fruitless one, for we found them gone, followed them here and I fear they have escaped us?"

"Yes, Karl, Pearl was awake last night and went to the window. She then saw the Sea Pearl moving out of the inlet under full sail, and at once called to me. This awakened Ralph."

"How is he?"

"He seemed all right, but has gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes, he went in chase of the Sea Pearl; and, what is more, Pearl slipped away with him, for she could not be found, and she told one of the men to tell me she was going."

"Tell me just what has occurred, wife."

"When she saw the Sea Pearl under sail she called to me. Ralph at once took in the situation and gave the alarm, sending a man to the shore."

"There was found some twenty riderless horses, and out where the Sea Pearl had been at anchor was the large whale-boat, showing how they had gone off to the schooner."

"I could not compel Ralph to keep quiet, for he said Marlo and his men had eluded you, gotten to the coast and escaped."

"The store-house was found broken open and provisions and other things taken, showing that they intended leaving never to return and to make a long cruise of it before landing."

"Ralph was as cool as an icicle, and at once decided to go in pursuit in Massey's Idle Wings, the best one of the fleet left."

"He called for a crew, and besides his own men got some twenty more, and others he set to work to bring down from the cliff the two guns, taken from the wreck of the Rainbow, while he set the crew to putting the schooner in perfect trim."

"He took provisions on board for a month's run, and extra spars and sails which he said he might find useful."

"In just two hours after the discovery by Pearl of the flight of our vessel, Ralph sailed out of the harbor in pursuit."

"I had been too busy to notice the absence of

Pearl, and a man came and told me to tell you she had gone on the Idle Wings."

"It is strange that Ralph allowed her to go."

"You may be certain that she concealed herself on board and that he did not know it."

"I suppose that is the case, for the little scamp is incorrigible."

"But Ralph will see that she is not allowed to get in harm's way."

"Oh, yes, he will look after her, Karl, but then he was not able to go, though no power could prevent his doing so."

"What time did he leave?"

"An hour before dawn, and at sunrise I could see the Sea Pearl far down the coast, under full sail, and the Idle Wings in full pursuit before the wind, Ralph having rigged extra sails, never heard of before, with the spars and canvas he had taken on board."

"In fact we could hardly see the Idle Wings she was so covered with canvas."

"Well, if he can be caught Ralph will do it, only it distresses me to have Pearl witness such a scene as must follow, for Marlo is a desperate man and will fight to the death."

"So I fear, Karl; but we will hope for the best."

"Yes, that is all that we can do."

"But I had determined to take Massey's boat myself and go in pursuit, but Ralph is ahead of me."

"Still it might be well to follow in another of the fleet."

"Yes, it would be well to do so, Karl, and I am glad you spoke of it."

"I will at once look the fleet over and select the best one for the chase, while I will take with me extra spars and canvas, as Ralph did, and some fifteen or twenty men."

"Take every man you can, Karl, for should the Sea Pearl elude Ralph you might come upon her and be powerless without a crew large enough to cope with them."

"You are right, wife, as you always are."

"I will at once sound the tocsin of alarm and when the people assemble pick my crew."

This was done, and several hours after the sloop Racer was standing out of the inlet with all sail set.

At the helm was Captain Karl, and upon the decks of the sloop were two dozen brave men armed to the teeth.

The whole settlement stood upon the Point to see her go off in chase of the cowboy smugglers and their pursuers, and cheer after cheer greeted them.

Afar off, just visible like the rising of a sea gull, was the Idle Wings, while the best glass did not reveal anything of the sea Pearl with her fugitive crew.

It was nearly sunset, and soon after darkness fell upon the waters, shutting the Racer out from sight; but all knew that she was spending every energy in the double chase she was bound upon.

And over those left behind in the coasters' hamlet a gloom seemed to fall, for they had found outlaws and traitors in their midst, to cast a cloud over their heretofore peaceful existence.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A CRUISER IN PORT.

THE deep boom of a gun awakened the coasters of Point Desolation on the morning after the departure of the fugitive Cowboy Smugglers and their pursuers.

The worn-out people had slept later than was their wont, and the boom of the heavy gun caused them to spring from their beds in alarm.

Then, off beyond the reef, lay a small vessel-of-war, a steamer, schooner rigged.

Her flag, her guns, would tell the most ignorant that she was a revenue cutter, and that she had come there for a purpose.

Again her gun was fired and Mrs. Kenton read the signal correctly.

"She wants a pilot to run in, so, Vance, you go out at once and bring her in," said Mrs. Kenton, addressing an old sailor who hastily obeyed.

A flag was run up to show that her demand would be answered, then all watched the pilot as he ran out in a small sloop.

The reef that lay off the coast ran from point to point, a distance of several leagues, and only here and there could a vessel pass, through it, while one drawing over twenty feet could not do so at any one of the channels.

The pilot in his light sloop ran straight out under a stiff breeze, and passed through a narrow channel off which lay the cutter.

He was seen to run alongside and go on board,

when the two men left in his boat put back the way they had gone out.

The cutter meanwhile headed down the coast for a mile, when her pilot turned her into a channel through the reef just wide enough for her to pass through.

From the moment of his going on board Vance had carried out the instructions of Mrs. Kenton not to talk with the officers.

He therefore caused himself trouble by pretending to be deaf and dumb, and pointing inshore.

In vain was he asked questions, for not one would be appear to hear.

He however did his duty, ran the cutter in through the reef, and up the inlet to the little land-covered harbor, where he brought her to and the anchor was let fall.

The boats were lowered and filled with men, and as the cutter's captain sprung on shore he was met by a coaster who presented the compliments of Captain Karl Kenton's wife, who was in command in the absence of the chief, and asked if he would visit her at her house.

"Well, Divine, that is a courteous invitation from a smuggler chief's wife," said Captain Edgar Yerger, the handsome commander of the cutter, turning to one of his officers.

"Yes, sir, and I suppose you will accept it?"

"Oh yes. Show me the way, my man."

Then turning to his lieutenant he continued:

"March your men up into the settlement and await orders."

"Yes, sir," and the fifty men landed were marched up into the coasters' hamlet.

Captain Yerger meanwhile followed his guide up to the house of the coaster chief.

The house was pointed out and the officer was left to go on alone.

The air of refinement resting upon the place surprised him, and as he entered the library he was more than ever astonished at what he beheld.

Just then there glided into the room a woman of thirty-three or four, though she did not look so old.

Her face was beautiful, her manner queenly, and she was dressed in a neat-fitting robe of black, which became her elegant form.

The captain quickly doffed his cap and turned toward her, when from his lips broke the words:

"Valerie! My God! is it you or your ghost?"

"Edgar, my brother! Do we meet again, after long years—I like one risen from the grave?" she said in a low voice.

He sprung toward her now and folded her in his arms, while he said in a voice full of emotion:

"Valerie, my sister, I believed you dead."

"How is it that I find you alive and a dweller among smugglers?"

"No, no, Edgar they are not smugglers, but humble coasters, and ranchmen who earn their living by the hardest of work and honest toil."

"Tell me all, Valerie, for I am fairly dazed with amazement."

"It can be soon told, Edgar."

"At home I loved one whom both you and father refused the house, and said I should never wed."

"You believed him guilty of a crime of which I now know him to have been innocent, and which, thank Heaven, I never for a moment believed him guilty of."

"There were those who told father that he was a forger, an adventurer, and he suffered under the charge for my sake."

"A wanderer he was, yes, for, fond of travel, and with a fortune of his own, he spent years in roaming."

"He never even told me that he was well off, and I loved him for himself alone the moment I first met him."

"Then came the story of that forged check on the bank, and it was traced to him."

"He could not prove his innocence, or would not, and he fled to save himself from prison."

"Six months after you remember a man was found dying in the highway near our home."

"It was the private secretary of our father, and he had just strength enough left to say that Kent Carleton killed him."

"I remember all, Valerie."

"Soon after I was missed from home, and, as I had gone out in my row-boat, and a storm had come up, it was supposed I had been lost, for the boat was found. But, in vain was the search made for my body."

"Yes, and how deeply I mourned your loss, my sister."

"Instead, I had gone with the man I loved."

"The murderer and forger!" said the captain, in angry tones filled with reproach.

"The man accused of forgery and murder, Edgar," was the quiet response of Mrs. Kenton, "but an honorable man, and guilty of no crime!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

PROOF.

"I AM listening, Valerie," said Captain Yerger, deeply moved by what he had heard.

"Then let me tell you that the real forger was our father's private secretary, Seth Cameron."

"He was, in secret, a gambler; he had squandered a great deal of money, and by that forgery was able to replace what he had stolen from father."

"He had vowed that I should never marry Kent Carleton, and he so arranged his plans that the forgery was traced to him, and circumstantial evidence made a fugitive of the man now my husband."

"He came back in disguise to see me, and I met him secretly."

"While there together, Seth Cameron came upon us."

"He was armed and rushed upon Kent, who tried to disarm him, and in the struggle to save his own life, he was forced to take that of Seth Cameron."

"I saw all, and know that Kent acted only to save his life."

"Then he again became a fugitive, but not until I promised to become his wife when he should come for me."

"It was I who sent some one down the road, that the man might be found, for I believed him dead; but with his last breath he accused Kent Carleton of being his murderer."

"And it was I, Edgar, who got hold of Seth Cameron's private papers, in his desk at our house, and placed them all in the hands of my husband, and there was the proof that he was the forger, not only of that check for five thousand dollars, but of others."

"Believed to be dead myself, my husband a hunted man for crimes he was guiltless of, we sought a haven here, Edgar, among these good people, and if not happy with the cloud upon us we have been content at least, in the love of our daughter Pearl."

"You have a daughter, then, Valerie?"

"Yes, and I believe you will say she is beautiful when you see her."

"Where is she?"

"Away on a chase after Marlo the smuggler and traitor."

"Hail we came here to capture him; but why should she go?"

"I will tell you all."

"But your husband, where is he?"

"Off on the same errand—to catch the renegade and outlaw."

"Let me know all, Valerie, for I came here to clean out what was believed to be a nest of smugglers."

"You wrong us, Edgar; but then I am used to that as is my husband, who is known here as Karl Kenton, and he is chief of the coasters."

"You interest me more and more, Valerie, so let me hear the strange story of your life here."

They had been standing while talking; but now she led him to a seat, and sitting by his side, with her hand in his she said:

"Edgar, you know how dearly I always loved you, and I wished I could have told you all, yet I dared not, knowing your prejudice against Kent Carleton, and that you believed him guilty of all that he was charged with."

"Three years ago I saw the death of my father in a paper, and both Kent and myself grieved deeply, that he should have died never knowing the truth about him, and that I was yet alive."

"And father left me all his fortune, Valerie, but of course half of it is yours, and gladly will I share it with you, my sister!"

"Oh, no; I do not need more riches than we have, and we are by no means poor."

"But let me tell you of our life here, of these people, and why you do not find my husband or daughter here now."

"I shall be more than glad to hear all, Valerie."

"First let me say that no one here must know the relationship in which we stand to each other."

"Valerie!"

"It must be, shall be so."

"My husband is Karl Kenton here, and so he must remain, for until he can take Pearl out into the world with a fortune of her own, and no blemish upon her father's name, here he will remain."

"You shall have your way, Valerie, but I shall see to it that Kent Carleton's name is cleared of the stain upon it. That now is a duty of honor as well as justice."

"God bless you for those words, Edgar."

"I am rich, a bachelor still, and commander of the Revenue Cutter Rush, for I received an appointment in the marine service twelve years ago, as I liked a sea life and wished not to be idle."

"Now I will have plenty to do, and a pleasure will it be, to clear the name of your husband of the cloud resting upon it."

Then in her quiet way Valerie Carleton, as she really was, told her brother of the double life led by the coasters, as ranchmen and fishermen.

She told him of how her husband had been made chief, and that his word was law.

Then she spoke of the wreck of the barque Rainbow, Pearl's daring rescue, and how the strange youth, Ralph Rollo, had made his home with them, and all that had followed his stay there.

Of Marlo she spoke, and of the discovery of his treachery as a coaster, and that they had only found out two nights before that he and his crew had turned cowboy smugglers.

"But, wounded and suffering though he was, Ralph went in chase of the fugitive cowboy smugglers, and when my husband returned he too went in pursuit, and there is every hope that the cowboy crew will be captured."

"Of course the going of Pearl was simply the impulse of her daring nature, and if you care to steam after them, for they went down the coast, I shall be glad, for I am really most anxious regarding my husband and child."

"I will depart at once, if you will give me a pilot to carry me out."

"I will order the same man to go with you, for he knows the whole coast perfectly."

"But he is deaf and dumb."

Mrs. Carleton laughed at this and answered:

"Well, brother mine, he was told to answer no questions; but I can cure his loss of speech and hearing for you, Edgar."

So, after a few words more the two left the cabin together, the sailors of the cutter were withdrawn from the hamlet and sent aboard, while Mrs. Carleton told the pilot to go with the vessel and that he need be no longer deaf and dumb.

Then under a full head of steam the cutter started in pursuit, while the people of the hamlet blessed their captain's beautiful wife for having so easily gotten rid of the Blue Jackets, of whom they stood in great awe.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE TREBLE CHASE.

ONCE he was on board the Idle Wings, in pursuit of the cowboy smugglers on the Sea Pearl, Ralph the Runaway really forgot his wound, and set to work to do all in his power to overhauled the fugitives.

He felt that he had much at stake, for Marlo had tried to murder him, then had eluded Captain Karl, and last had run off with the Sea Pearl.

He took the helm himself and laid the course of the Idle Wings out of a break in the reef that was seldom attempted, on account of its danger.

But it cut off a mile and this he gained on the chase, passing through in safety.

He then put the schooner before the wind, and rigged spars out on either side to aid drive her along with the extra sail he was thus enabled to set. As night was coming he saw that they were gaining, for his extra sail scheme worked well.

"We will catch her, Ralph; don't you think so?"

Ralph the Runaway fairly sprung from his seat as he heard the words.

There in the companionway stood Pearl, a smile upon her lovely face.

"How did you get here Pearl?" he gasped.

"Oh, I came aboard in the excitement, so hid, and here I am."

"You did very wrong, Pearl."

"Think so, Ralph?"

"I know so, for your father and mother will be very angry."

"Not a bit of it, for they will understand that I could no more have missed this chase than I could fly."

"I tell you, Ralph, it is glorious, and we will catch him."

"I hope so."

"And hang him too?"

"Oh Pearl!"

"I am getting really vicious toward Marlo now, Ralph."

"Lads, what do you think of the trick Pearl has played upon us?" asked Captain Rollo.

"She'll bring us good luck, captain," avowed one, sturdily.

"Yes, indeed she will."

"I am glad she came."

"We won't let her get hurt, that's certain."

And so the comments went around until at last Ralph himself was glad that the young girl had come.

As night came on the question arose as to whether they would lose the Sea Pearl in the night.

But Ralph decided that Marlo would not stand far out to sea, and being anxious to get on his way as far as possible from Point Desolation, he would not seek a hiding-place in any of the inlets along the coast.

The Idle Wings was accordingly held on her course, a league off-shore, and a bright lookout was kept with a glass for the chase.

"One thing I am glad of, Pearl, and that is that I took my glass ashore with me, so there is none on board the Sea Pearl, while having mine with me we can see him a league further off than he can us," said Ralph, and he went forward himself to try and find the chase.

As the moon arose he did so and he saw that he had done right in holding on, for the Sea Pearl was standing straight on down the coast.

Thus through the night he held the chase in sight, and when day dawned was glad to see that he had gained all of a half a league upon her.

There was visible some excitement on board the Sea Pearl, when it was discovered that their pursuer had not been thrown off their scent and that she had gained upon them.

But no more sail could be set on her, while, thanks to Ralph for putting aboard the extra spars and canvas on the Idle Wings, though a slower craft she steadily though slowly gained upon the vessel of the cowboy smugglers.

The chase held on during the day, with the Idle Wings creeping up to within a league of the Sea Pearl, while far astern was visible a sail which Ralph turned his glass upon and said was the Racer.

As the day wore on there was a sign of ugly weather, and yet pursued and pursuers held on under full sail.

Just at sunset afar astern was visible a smoke, and all knew that it was from a steamer, yet could understand no more regarding its being then on the coast.

With the darkness the storm came, and when it broke the Idle Wings was within a mile of the Sea Pearl.

The two vessels were stripped to meet the storm, for it blew great guns, while the peals of thunder and flashes of lightning were incessant.

Suddenly a cry arose from all on board the Idle Wings, as a vivid flame of fire shot downward from the black clouds and lighting upon the tall mainmast of the Sea Pearl shivered it to atoms.

At once darkness followed, and thus passed several minutes when flames were seen to shoot up from the doomed craft of the cowboy smugglers, and soon the beautiful little vessel was in flames!

"She is doomed, with all on board, unless we can get there to save them."

"Crowd on sail, lads, for humanity, not revenge calls upon us now," cried Captain Ralph.

But the gale increased, the sail had to be taken in, and before their eyes the crew of the Idle Wings saw the Sea Pearl burn until she sunk beneath the waves and all was darkness again.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CONCLUSION.

"LET go the anchor and we will ride it out."

"The gale is off the sea so the wreck will be washed ashore," said Ralph the Runaway.

And through the night the Idle Wings rode out the storm, which ended toward daybreak.

The sun rose clear and showed the land two leagues away and a dark object lying upon the sands which all knew was the wrecked Sea Pearl.

Away out at sea was seen a steamer lying to. It was the cutter, and near her lay the Racer.

At once Ralph headed for the shore, and when quite near anchored and landed in a surf skiff.

He soon returned with his report that the hull of the Sea Pearl had burned down to her decks, and that the shore was strewn with the bodies of the cowboy smugglers, charred beyond all recognition.

"Not a soul escaped, I feel sure, Pearl; but

we buried their bodies up among the pines, and now we are ready to tell the story to the officer of yonder revenue cutter coming toward us, and to see if your father is not in the Racer."

Soon after, a boat came aboard from the revenue cutter, requesting the presence of Ralph and Pearl on board, to report to Captain Yerger.

They at once obeyed, and, conducted to the cabin, they found there Captain Yerger in earnest conversation with the coaster chief.

He had overhauled the Racer in the night, and had kept near her until morning, when he hailed and ordered Captain Karl Kenton on board.

There in the cabin of the cutter the two men met, and then it was that Kent Carleton learned that Captain Yerger had visited Point Desolation, had seen his sister, and knew all.

And once more the story was told to Pearl and Ralph, and both were happy at hearing it, though sworn to secrecy, at least for the present.

Ralph told of the destruction of the Sea Pearl, the light of which they had seen, and so the prows of the steamer, the Idle Wings, and the Racer, were turned up the coast again.

The cutter held on to Frisco to report the doom that had befallen Marlo the cowboy smuggler and his men, while the two little vessels put into the harbor and made the story known there.

Then Captain Karl pardoned young Berkley, to the great joy of his mother, and in spite of the wrong he had done him, Ralph frankly offered him his hand.

Long after it became known just what the history of "Captain Karl" was, and the cloud being no longer upon him he was free to mingle with the world to which he and his wife had so long been strangers.

And while it was through Captain Yerger that the honorable name of Kent Carleton was cleared of dishonor, so it was through him that Ralph the Runaway was discovered as the long-lost heir to Harcourt Hall and the title attached to it, as also the fortune.

But Ralph the Runaway preferred to be an American citizen to an English noble, so resigned all right and titles in England, to wed Pearl Carleton, and settle down in his elegant home upon the shores of the Pacific Ocean.

THE END.

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